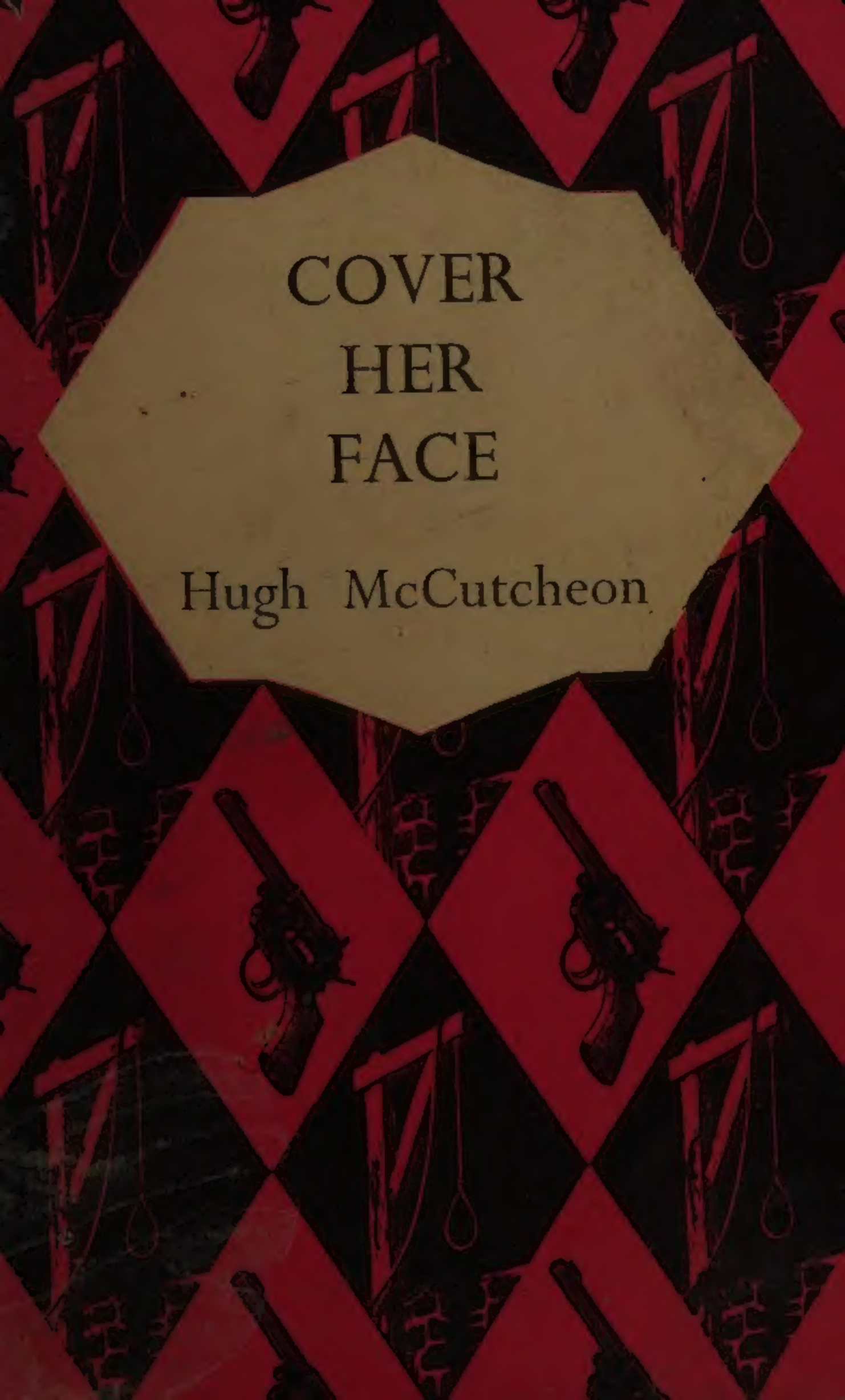
COVER
HER
FACE
Hugh McCutcheon

Anthony Howard and his lovely wife, Lenore, are honeymooning in Paris when, at midnight on the Quai du Louvre, he prevents a beautiful girl, who appears to be in a hypnotic trance, from drowning herself in the Seine. All she will say is "*Je suis l'Inconnue*"—I am the Unknown—and later, when Anthony hears the story of l'Inconnue de la Seine—a real-life, unknown girl, drowned off the Quai du Louvre more than thirty years before—he is convinced that the new 'Unknown' is in deadly danger. Armed with the slenderest of clues, he sets out to find her and how he does so is detection at its most brilliant.

Here is a thriller of distinction, of mounting tension and decisive action, played out against the exciting background of a big golf championship and with Anthony Howard at the very top of his form.

"The final twist will satisfy the most hardened detective reader."

*Manchester Evening News*

"A thoughtful yarn which provides thrills without blood and bludgeon."

*Liverpool Daily Post*

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At the Marathon Hotel he meets some unforgettable characters and has some grim experiences. There is the mystery of the chalet called 'Zurich', of the hatpin under the pier, of the box of golf balls—or were they golf balls? Of the luscious Heloise Rohan, who had a horror of traitors, and of the young actress, Venetia Lynn, lost overboard from a ship on which Charles Rohan was a passenger. Anthony tangles with his old antagonist, Detective-Inspector McKellar, and more than once he is close to death before the murderer is cornered.

BY THE SAME AUTHOR:

The Angel of Light
None Shall Sleep Tonight
Prey for the Nightingale

# COVER HER FACE

by

HUGH McCUTCHEON

THE MYSTERY BOOK GUILD
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To

MURIEL

*con amore*

*All the characters in this story, apart from some famous golfers specifically named, are entirely fictitious and bear no relation whatever to any persons living or dead. Fairlake, although it bears some resemblance to an actual resort that will be known to many, is also fictitious.*

## CONTENTS


| | | |
|---|---|---|
| *Chapter* I | Nocturne | *Page* 9 |
| II | Lost | 21 |
| III | Found | 33 |
| IV | A Rohan at Play | 46 |
| V | A Rohan at War | 64 |
| VI | Marks of Violence | 79 |
| VII | The Chalet called 'Zurich' | 96 |
| VIII | The Photograph | 110 |
| IX | The Letter | 123 |
| X | The Gimmick | 136 |
| XI | The Parcel | 150 |
| XII | Conquest of Clare | 162 |
| XIII | Death of an Actress | 176 |
| XIV | The Name of Evil | 188 |
| XV | The Moment of Triumph | 201 |

## CHAPTER ONE

# NOCTURNE

I DO not know what drew me to the river bank that evening, but I like to think that it was Fate. Lenore, tired after a crowded day, had gone to bed, but I had a vinous headache that craved fresh air. So I walked through the Tuileries Garden down to the Seine.

We had discovered a tiny restaurant in the rue de St. Anne called, in English, the House of John the Fisherman, and there we had dined on this our second evening in the most romantic city in the world. I had insisted on ordering the appropriate wine for each course and there had been many courses. Too many for Lenore.

It was close on midnight and the river looked black and shiny as an old silk hat, save where the street lamps gilded it. The traffic noises were muted now, but the reek of 'essence', mixed with drains, hung over the city like an invisible pall. I stood for a moment drinking in the scene then began to walk along by the Quai du Louvre towards Pont Neuf.

I was thinking of all that had happened in my thirty-eight years of life. Of my first wife, dead these many years and of our brief, ecstatic honeymoon in Hong Kong where my ship was stationed at the time; of the empty, bitter years that had followed; of my first command, lost in a night of terror in the last year of the war; of the wound that had crippled one leg and of how I could now walk without a stick and almost without a limp; of how I had turned private detective, met Lenore and saved her from the hangman's rope;[1] of how I was a husband again, honeymooning in Paris and of how all things work together for good.

I lit a cigarette, tossed the match over the parapet and watched it land on the cobbles below. My headache was beginning to yield to the balm of the summer night and I was about to turn and stroll back to the hotel when my eye was caught by the figure of a woman walking smartly along the embankment towards me.

[1] *The Angel of Light.*

I had not heard her approach which was strange as her high heels clicked like castanets on the concrete pavement and for a moment I was quite startled. Her sudden materialization had the air of magic, as if she had been created, imbued with life and set in motion all in a moment by some invisible necromancer. I almost expected to catch a whiff of brimstone, but all that reached my nostrils was an emanation of perfume as heady and exciting as the first sigh of the East on the face of the young Joseph Conrad, whispering the same promise of mysterious delight.

But if her perfume was of the East the woman herself was undoubtedly of the West. It was in her springing walk, her proudly tilted head. She was a woman with somewhere to go and she was going there as swiftly and directly as she could. We were alone against the backcloth of the night and although, for all she knew, I might be a robber or a ravisher, she did not falter. She seemed to be walking straight at me as if I had no existence. Perhaps she was short-sighted, I thought, and, certainly, I was standing in shadow.

A few yards away to my right, a flight of steps led down to the Quai and, almost as if she were a robot, she wheeled towards them and began to descend. She was wearing black and her face was pallid as the waning moon.

At the foot of the steps she paused, then began to walk towards the river, slowly, but with a dreadful purpose. She was carrying a black evening-bag and all at once she stretched out her right arm to the side, opened her fingers and let the bag fall. It burst open as it hit the cobbles and I heard the clink of coins. She took no notice. She had not dropped the bag by accident. The gesture had been deliberate, a gesture of renunciation, of abandonment. Then her grey fur wrap floated down to join the bag and I went into action.

"Stop!" I shouted, and ran blindly down the steps. I moved much faster than my game leg was used to and the wrench I gave it almost caused me to topple headlong. It had not hurt for some time, but now a wave of white-hot agony went through it from thigh to ankle, and when I reached the woman I was trembling with pain.

I swung her round and placed myself between her and the river. "Don't be silly," I said, "it's wet down there."

Her gaze went right through me and beyond. The river

was a goal she had to reach, but, when she tried to move round me, I gripped her arm and held her. "Please let me help you," I begged. "It can't be as bad as all that."

She spoke then in a low, throaty voice, so low that I had to bend my head to catch the words. "*Je suis l'inconnue,*" she said and again, louder this time, almost as if it were a command, "*Je suis l'inconnue.*"

I changed to French in which I am not fluent. "Pardon, mademoiselle, I wish only to help you. You must listen to [illegible]."

"*Je suis l'inconnue!*" she repeated in a voice of desperation, and tried to push past me to the river. She was shaking all over and her eyes were wide open and rolling in a sort of frenzy. "Good God!" I thought, "she's in some kind of trance."

I remembered, when I was in the naval hospital, seeing one of the doctors who specialized in medical hypnotism bringing a patient out of a trance, and snapped my fingers in front of her eyes. "*Reveillez vous, reveillez vous,*" I exhorted.

It did not seem to have the slightest effect and, taking her by the shoulders, I shook her till her head rolled. It is supposed to be dangerous to awaken a somnambulist so abruptly, but this seemed a time for desperate measures. "*Je suis l'inconnue,*" she said again, pleadingly, her voice dying on a sob.

I slapped her face, hard, the crack of it ringing out like a pistol shot in the throbbing night. "Oh!" She cried and reeled back, then I saw her eyes flicker and their expression change. A look of bewilderment crossed her face and I saw that she was aware of me now as a person, not just as an obstacle.

She opened her mouth as if to scream, but I clapped a hand over it and held her tight against me, my other arm about her waist. It was a young waist, slender and supple. "Don't get excited," I said, speaking English again in my agitation. "I'm trying to help you. You were walking in your sleep and almost went into the river." I could smell liquor on her breath.

She wrenched her head away. "Let me go!" she exclaimed, speaking English also. I obeyed at once and stood back.

"Do you feel all right now?" I asked.

She stood gazing at me, her bosom heaving, her eyes still wide, but with the dazed look wholly gone. "Who are you?"

she demanded. "Did you bring me here?" Her eyes swivelled to the surrounding scene, taking in the cobbled Quai, the dark and silent Seine, the sweep of the bridges and the buildings on the left bank.

"Where is this, anyway?"

"The Quai du Louvre. You were trying to make a hole in the river and I stopped you—just in time."

"Trying—do you mean I was trying to drown myself?"

"With the greatest determination."

"But that's fantastic." She spoke English like a native and an educated one at that yet, in her trance-like state, she had spoken in French. *Je suis l'inconnue.* I am the unknown. That was fantastic, too.

"May I prescribe a cognac in the nearest café? You've had a bad shake."

"Are you a doctor?"

I hesitated. "No."

She saw her fur wrap on the ground, picked it up, smoothed it with long, black-gloved fingers and settled it round her neck. Her low-cut cocktail frock was of black nylon and looked expensive.

I bent to pick up her bag. It had spilled its contents in a scattered semi-circle and I gathered them together: lipstick, powder-compact, bridge pencil, comb, handkerchief, cigarette-case with lighter combined, some coins, a thin bundle of notes folded small. "Is this all?" I asked, holding the bag open for her inspection.

She rummaged among the contents. "Yes, I think so. No, wait—there's something else." She cast her eyes round and then I saw something glitter, a yard or two away, in the light shining from a street lamp on the embankment above. It was a tiny gold figure about an inch long, the figure of a man swinging a golf club. The man had a ruby head and there was a pin attached so that she could use it as a brooch or a piece of costume jewellery. The golf club was slightly bent and I straightened it.

She dropped the little figure into her bag with a word of thanks. "My luck piece," she explained.

"Just as well you had it with you," I said. "It worked." Probably some man had given it to her and no doubt the giver meant even more to her than the gift. I put my hand on her

elbow to assist her up the steps and escorted her to a café where the pavement tables had not yet been taken in for the night. For the first time I saw her in the light.

Her hair, black and shining as the river we had left behind, was parted in the centre and twisted in neat coils behind her tiny ears. It was a fashion of yesterday, but I could imagine no other that would have suited her so well. Her dark, strongly marked eyebrows and full red lips contrasted with the magnolia whiteness of her skin and the long column of her neck had a purity of line that reminded me of classical sculpture. Indeed everything about her, her small head, her straight nose, her high bosom, had a classical austerity and her half-smile held all the mysterious allure of the Mona Lisa's. I had seen the Mona Lisa in the Louvre on the previous day and was quite startled by the resemblance.

Her throat flushed as she drank the cognac and I said brightly, "You must be like Mary Queen of Scots whose skin was said to be so pure that when she drank wine you could see it going down her throat."

She laughed at that and set her glass down on the table. She had almost drained it at the first gulp and I saw warm colour flow into her cheeks. Her hands still trembled a little, I noticed, but, otherwise, she seemed composed.

"Please tell me about it," she said. "How you found me and—and everything."

She listened in a silence so intense that I thought at first she had gone into a trance again, then she sighed. "I don't understand it at all. It's—frightening. *Je suis l'inconnue?* I am the unknown." She paused and shook her head, several times, very quickly. "I really haven t a clue."

"Do you often walk in your sleep?"

"Never, so far as I know."

"Have you been ill recently?"

"No."

I paused a long time, holding her gaze, then I said, "Ever dabbled in hypnotism?"

"Hypnotism!" She gave a high-pitched, hysterical giggle. "That's silly."

I dropped my eyes to her waist and she said quickly, "No, Mr. Howard, I'm not *enceinte*."

I looked up, startled. "How do you know my name?"

"I read your last book. Your photograph was on the cover. While you were talking just now it dawned on me I'd seen you before somewhere, but I couldn't think where. Then I remembered the photograph and I also saw your wedding photograph in the *Tatler* a fortnight ago. You're Anthony Howard, the author and private detective."

"You have the advantage of me."

She smiled the half-teasing smile that reminded me so much of the Mona Lisa. "*Je suis l'inconnue,*" she said. "Have you been long in Paris, Mr. Howard?"

"We arrived late on the night before last after a week on the Costa Brava and a week at Monte Carlo. We'll be here for several days. And you, Miss ——?"

"I came here four days ago from Le Touquet. I'll be going home soon."

"And where is home?"

She gave me that smile again. "Let's fall back on the wartime phrase, 'Somewhere in England'."

"You're very mysterious."

"That's in character. You've had an intriguing encounter with a dark stranger. Let's keep it that way."

"I'd like to help you if I can."

"I can't afford the services of a private detective, especially an expensive one like you. You've been very successful."

"I've had a lot of luck."

"What's the secret of your success?"

"I never believe the obvious."

She nodded as if I had given her the answer she expected. "You married the girl in the Angel of Light case, didn't you? The one you saved from being hanged."

"Yes."

"Very romantic. Where is she now?"

"At our hotel, ringing up the hospitals to see if I've been brought in yet."

"Oh, I'm so sorry. I'm keeping you, and on your honeymoon, too." She made to rise, but I put out a hand and pushed her down again gently.

"You can't leave me like this. You're in some sort of trouble, aren't you?"

She was silent for a little then she said slowly: "Perhaps I am in a little trouble, but I think I know how to handle it.

Forewarned is forearmed and I'd very much rather you'd forget about it."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes, I got into this on my own and I'll get out of it the same way."

"You haven't lost your memory, have you?"

She looked at her wrist-watch. "I've no memory of the last hour, until you spoke to me on the Quai du Louvre, but I remember everything else."

"What is your last conscious recollection?"

"I was at a cocktail party. I'm afraid I drank rather a lot and must have passed out."

"Were there men at this party?"

The smile again. "Otherwise it wouldn't have been a party." She stood up quickly and I rose, too. "I'll see you safe home," I offered.

"No, please. It isn't far."

"All the more reason."

"Well, if you must. I'm staying at the Hôtel Cœur de Lion. It's only a step."

"Feel able to walk?"

"Of course." We fell into step side by side. She looked back, half regretfully, I thought, at the bright lights of the café. "Paris is two thousand years old," she said. "Tonight I can believe it."

I refused to accept the change of subject. "Was the cocktail party at your hotel?"

"No. Don't let your profession rule you, Mr. Howard. I'll be all right. Have you written any good books lately?"

"No. Where did you read the last one?"

"At Gleneagles, in Scotland. I was there on holiday," she added quickly.

We were at the Hôtel Cœur de Lion already. She halted and gave me her hand. "Well," she said, "ships that pass in the night and this is my harbour. I'm so very grateful to you, Mr. Howard, but this is good-bye."

I smiled at her. She smiled back. "Does your wife ever tell you you have a very attractive smile?" she asked.

"She married me because of it. You have a very attractive smile, too, but I could wish it was less mysterious."

"Poor Mr. Howard."

"Look, if you don't need a policeman or a private detective, will you see a doctor?"

"We wouldn't have met if it hadn't been for a doctor. Good night."

I watched her walk smartly up the steps, through the swing doors and out of my life. Then I walked back along the rue St. Honoré to the avenue de l'Opéra. My leg throbbed where I had wrenched it and I was limping more than I had limped for months. Physically I felt tired and drained, but mentally I was excited and on edge.

The avenue was wide, straight, well lighted and empty of life, save for two smartly dressed *poules* pattering along on their high heels on the other side of the strect. One of them gave me the come hither, but turned indifferently away when I made no sign. Paris by night, I thought. Paris had everything. Romance, mystery, danger, heartbreak. She was the mother of all cities.

I turned into the narrow street where our hotel stood in a discreet backwater and, picturing a distraught Lenore, took the elevator to the second floor. The key was in the door, the room in darkness and when I switched the light on all I could see of Lenore was a halo of honey-coloured hair on the white pillow. How she doesn't suffocate beats me.

She seemed to be asleep and my spirits sank, for it is pleasant to be welcomed home by a lovely, compliant and very new wife. I wanted to talk, but had compassion on her slumbers and moved about the room on tiptoe, trying not to make a noise. I was not very successful, however, for first I tripped over a pair of shoes then I dropped a hair-brush, and when I opened the wardrobe door, it creaked malevolently.

As I removed my tie, I saw my face in the dressing-table mirror. There were sooty patches under my eyes and I needed a shave. Portrait of a debauched detective, I thought. I could hear Lenore's gentle breathing in the silence of the room and was glad I had not disturbed her.

"*Je suis l'inconnue,*" I said to my image in the mirror, and it was only when I heard Lenore's voice that I realized I had spoken aloud.

"Not you," she said. "You're not nearly pretty enough."

"Sorry, darling, I thought you were asleep."

"I was till the herd of elephants arrived." She rolled over,

struggled up on the pillow and looked at the little travelling clock some well-meaning relative had given us for a wedding present. "Heavens! Where did you walk to? Calais?"

"I had a strange encounter."

"With a ghost?"

I turned from the mirror and looked at her. Her gaze, as ever, was wide and wholly innocent. She was wearing the black nylon nightie I had insisted on and one shoulder-strap had slipped right down. She looked extremely fetching. "Your defences are down," I pointed out.

"That should worry you after the Folies-Bergère." She adjusted the shoulder strap mechanically and tried to rub the sleep out of her eyes.

"Why should you assume a ghost?" I asked.

"That *je suis l'inconnue* remark. I thought perhaps you might have seen *l'Inconnue de la Seine.*"

I went over and sat on the bed. "And who," I asked, "is *l'Inconnue de la Seine?*"

"Was, darling. She's been dead a long time. It's one of those heartbreak stories."

"Tell me."

"In February, 1919," began Lenore in her best raconteur's voice, "the body of a young woman was taken out of the Seine at the Quai du Louvre. She was beautiful, so beautiful that she inspired pity in the hearts of all who saw her. Poets wrote sonnets to her, a death mask was made of her face, and for a time her sad story was the talk of Paris. It was never discovered how she came to be in the river and her identity was never established. After thirty years she is still *l'Inconnue de la Seine.*"

"Good lord!" I exclaimed, and again, "Good lord!"

"Why the agitation?"

"Because I met *l'Inconnue de la Seine* tonight. In the flesh."

"I knew that dinner was a mistake."

"It's true. This girl insisted that she was *l'Inconnue* and tried quite desperately to drown herself. I stopped her."

"Was she drunk?"

"No," I said slowly, "I don't think she was drunk. Neither was she deranged. Do you know what I think?"

"You'll tell me."

"I think someone put her under deep hypnosis, sold her the idea that she was *l'Inconnue de la Seine* and told her to drown herself. If I hadn't happened along murder would have been done tonight on the Quai du Louvre."

"Oh, darling, and I've been teasing you! Did it upset you? Tell me about it."

Lenore is *sympatique* and she has one of the most charming voices I have ever heard. It is soft and sweet and, almost always, compassionate; the kind of voice that can invest the most ordinary speech with unsuspected poignancy. The French have a name for that type of voice. They call it *la voix de larmes*: the voice of tears.

I sat on the bed and told her about *l'Inconnue* while she held one of my hands between both of hers. She was very quiet when I stopped talking, but her grip on my hand tightened. Then, "You're worried about her, aren't you?" she probed.

I tugged my hand free, rose and began to pace up and down the room. "Yes," I admitted, "I think she's in great danger."

"Anthony, look at me." I paused and obeyed. "Don't get into one of your states about this. She told you she didn't need help, that forewarned was forearmed and she was right. If she was really hypnotized she'd know who did it and keep away from him. But she might just have had a brainstorm, some kind of hysteria."

"Yes."

"Do you know anything about hypnotism?"

"Not much. Do you?"

"No."

"Did your father ever speak of it?"

"No, he was the old-fashioned type of family doctor. To him hypnotists were charlatans."

I pulled off my shirt. "I wonder how he worked it, whoever he was." I crossed to the bed. "Let's try a reconstruction. Look at me." I took the concentrated, if amused, gaze of Lenore's lovely violet eyes, leaned closer to her and focussed my own eyes on an imaginary point beyond her, as if I were looking right through her. Then I said, "Your eyelids are growing heavy."

"I'm so glad you've noticed. Come to bed."

"When I have counted five you will be asleep."

"You can safely bet on that."

"Play up," I beseeched. I counted five slowly and made some hand passes in front of her eyes. The eyes closed. I waited a second or two, lifted one eyelid gently and met the indignant glare of a somewhat distended pupil. I released the eyelid and it dropped like a shutter. "You are now asleep," I said. "You will hear only my voice. You will obey only me."

"We dropped it from the marriage service. Remember?" said Lenore from the depth of her trance.

"You are *l'Inconnue de la Seine*."

"I am *l'Inconnue de la Seine*," conceded Lenore, with dutiful resignation.

"Life is a burden to you."

"I can see it's going to be."

"Come on, darling, give. Life is a burden to you."

"Life is a burden to me."

"Tonight you will end it."

"Tonight I will end it."

"At midnight from the Quai du Louvre."

"At midnight from the Quai du Louvre. I will walk all the way there with my eyes shut."

"Damn," I said. "I hadn't thought of that." I resumed my pacing of the room.

"All right," said Lenore. "I'll take pity on you, Svengali, and tell you all I can remember from daddy's books. There are various stages in a state of hypnotism, light trance, medium trance, deep or somnambulistic trance. In the last the subject can open his eyes without affecting the trance, there is somnambulism and complete amnesia. When this stage is reached the subject is said to be *en rapport* and can respond to nothing unless instructed by the hypnotist to do so. The subject has a sensation of lightness, there is dilation of the pupils and uncontrolled movements of the eyeballs."

"She was rolling her eyes like a lunatic," I confirmed. "I didn't know you had delved so deeply into daddy's books."

"I dipped into them a lot when I was a little girl because I wasn't supposed to. It took me two marriages to realize you can't get a proper idea of the facts of life from books."

I stepped out of my trousers, sat down and inspected my

leg. The scars were inflamed and the veins stood out angrily, as if about to burst through the flesh.

"Anthony," implored my wife, "please come to bed and forget about that girl. She doesn't want your help and probably doesn't need it. This is your honeymoon and honeymoons are sacred."

"Yes," I said.

"You know what you're like when you're on a case. You don't just give your services. You give yourself."

"I'm not on a case."

"Then will you please——"

"All right, all right," I broke in. "I agree that honeymoons are sacred. I've had a wonderful two days in Paris. I've seen the Mona Lisa and the Tomb of Napoleon. I've drunk champagne at the House of John the Fisherman and laughed my head off at the Folies-Bergère. I've had a mysterious encounter with a dark lady of the sonnets and now I'm going to bed with a blonde."

## CHAPTER TWO

# LOST

SOMETIME in the night Lenore shook me awake. "Anthony," I heard her say, "suppose it had been me."

"The verb to be——" I began.

She shook me again. "I didn't wake you up for a grammar lesson. It's that girl. I can't get her out of my mind."

"You had a good try at getting her out of mine. What do you mean, suppose it had been you?"

"I came to you for help once and if you had refused I'd have been dead. But you did help, you spent yourself to save me, you risked your liberty, your life even, and you were wonderfully clever. I've no right to keep you from helping someone else in danger."

"You insisted she was no longer in danger."

"I was trying to convince myself, but if she is in danger she needs you just as I needed you at the Angel of Light."

"I thought you'd come round."

"Then you'll go and see her in the morning?"

"What good would that do? She gave me the soldier's farewell."

"You can convince her she was wrong."

"How?"

"You'll think of something."

I sat up and reached for my cigarettes. The luminous dial of the travelling clock leered in my face. It was four o'clock in the morning. My spirits are not often high and never at four o'clock in the morning. "Smoke?"

"Light one for me."

The cigarettes glowed companionably in the dark. "One thing I remember reading about hypnotism," I said. "Post-hypnotic suggestions are carried out only when they're acceptable to the subject. In other words, you can't change a person's nature by hypnotism, make a man commit a major crime if he has no criminal tendencies, or induce a woman to commit suicide unless she has suicidal tendencies."

"Could your dark lady have suicidal tendencies?"

"She seemed a little intense. She might, if driven to the extreme of misery or despair, take her own life, but it's hard to say on so slight an acquaintance."

"While she was under she spoke in French?"

"Yes."

"And in English when she came to?"

"Correct."

"Significant."

"Very."

"Gives you the nationality of the hypnotist."

"You'll tell me his profession next."

"Doctor."

"Could be."

"She said you wouldn't have met if it hadn't been for a doctor."

"Darling," I said, "let's not degenerate into one of those ghastly husband and wife detective teams one reads about in the thrillers."

"No, Anthony. You're the clever one. You make the deductions and I'll listen to them, but don't shut me out."

"I would never do that. You can come with me in the morning if you like."

"You will go and see her, then?"

"If that's what you want."

"It's what you want, isn't it?"

"Yes, Lenore."

"But you were going to drop it because of me?"

"I would drop my hope of Heaven because of you."

"I was selfish. No woman wants the shadow of death across her honeymoon."

"No." I stubbed out the cigarette and lay on my back with my hands clasped under my head. The honeymoon was over.

Lenore sighed, gave me her cigarette to put out, kissed me gravely, turned on her side and was instantly asleep. Her conscience was clear now, but there was no more sleep for me. The Unknown of the Seine! Did the would-be murderer know yet that his plan had failed and if so, what would be his reaction? Would he act again at once or would he bide his time? Would the morning be too late?

We had breakfast in bed, if you could call it breakfast. I

am a bacon and egg man myself, but the coffee was certainly fragrant and the croissants melted in the mouth. Lenore was in her bath and I was almost dressed when the chambermaid came in for the tray. I tried out my French on her and we had a lovely conversation. Then Lenore came out of the bathroom and the chambermaid scuttled.

Lenore elbowed me skilfully away from the dressing-table, sat down and began the interminable process of doing her hair. "What was the chambermaid talking about?" she asked.

"She was asking how long we'd been married."

"What did you say?"

"I said long enough."

She reached up and patted my cheek. "That was clever of you, darling. What are you going to say to *l'Inconnue?*"

"I think I'll leave that to the inspiration of the moment."

"I wonder if she's in love with the man."

"She'll hardly be in love with him now after what he almost did to her."

"If I tried to kill you, Anthony, would you stop loving me, just like that?"

"No."

"Would you keep away from me?"

"I don't know. I might, but women are different."

"Yes, women are different. The more unworthy the object, the stronger our love."

"I must study to be unworthy, but isn't it possible that her love for this man, if it existed, may have turned to hatred?"

"What's hate but love carried to the last extreme?" As usual, Lenore had the last word.

The Hôtel Cœur de Lion had an atmosphere of sweet content. Its lounge hall was comfortably furnished, its *décor* restful to the eye. A somnolent porter, as well upholstered as the hotel chairs, slouched behind the reception desk and as I approached he opened one eye, sized me up and addressed me in English. "What can I do for monsieur?"

"There is a young lady staying here I'd like a few words with. I don't know her name, but I can describe her for you. She is English."

The porter shook his head. "Monsieur is mistaken. We have no English ladies. American ladies, Portuguese ladies, Swiss

ladies and French ladies, but no English. We have three English students, but they are all men."

"This lady is English," I insisted. "I left her here last night about quarter to one. She had black hair done up in two coils and she was wearing a black nylon cocktail frock and a grey fur wrap."

"She was beautiful, this young lady?"

"Very beautiful."

"I have not seen her." The porter looked downcast until I slipped him a five-hundred franc note which he palmed with skill. "Perhaps the night porter will remember her," he said. "He is having *petit déjeuner* in the kitchen."

"It concerns an affair of the heart," I proclaimed. An affair of the heart is something the French understand. It is an open sesame to their co-operation.

"I will send for Alphonse." The porter snapped his fingers at a tiny page-boy and sent him off at the run with a rapid burst of French. The page returned with Alphonse, a cadaverous individual with drooping moustaches and the saddest eyes in the world. Alphonse and the porter held an excited conversation that went on so long I thought they had forgotten my existence. Then the porter turned to me. Yes, Alphonse remembered well the lady. She had entered the hotel at the time I had stated, had seated herself at a table in the lounge hall and ordered coffee. Alphonse had kept a discreet eye on her, but she was not, it seemed, a *fille de joie*. She was superior. A lady. She had made no attempt to attract the attention of the men in the lounge, but had sipped her coffee, smoked a cigarette and gone out again. She had not stayed longer than fifteen minutes, she was not resident in the hotel and he had never seen her before.

So that was that. I rejoined Lenore who had taken a seat in the lounge and we went out into the sunlight. "She really is *l'Inconnue* now," Lenore commented.

"Yes. She had me nicely."

"Anthony, she *is* in love with the man. She's shielding him."

"She may have other reasons."

"What can we do now? Go to the police?"

"The police would laugh at us. Perhaps Michelet Frères can help." Michelet Frères were my French publishers, and I had

an appointment with Monsieur Michelet at eleven. My last book had been the first to achieve a French translation and its sales in France had been much more encouraging than in the English or American edition, so much so that I was enjoying a *succès d'estime* comparable to that of Georges Simenon in my own country.

We had lunched with Monsieur Michelet the day before and today I was to collect some advance royalties in francs so that we could enjoy our Paris stay without worrying about currency restrictions. We had dissipated most of our allowance in Spain and on the Riviera, and I had only one traveller's cheque left uncashed.

Monsieur Michelet, rotund and affable, greeted me as *'Cher Maître'*, which for some reason made Lenore shake with laughter. When we had concluded the financial business I told him the story of *l'Inconnue* and he heard me out with an occasional squeak of excitement. "Ah, M'sieu' Howard," he exclaimed, "what a subject for your next book! A young girl, beautiful, in danger and unknown. If she is not found in time she will die at the hand of an assassin. Yes, it has possibilities, that."

I felt myself frown. I had not thought of *l'Inconnue* as a subject for a book, but as a human life in the balance. I believe, with John Donne, that no man is an island, that any man's death diminishes me because I am involved in mankind. Eve, my first wife, had died at the hand of an assassin and when she had needed me most I had not been there. No, I had not thought of *l'Inconnue* as a subject for a book.

"I must find her," I said.

"It will not be easy. I have a friend in the Sûreté and if you like I will speak to him. But I do not see what he can do. No crime has been committed, the girl has vanished, there is no real evidence that a crime was contemplated."

"I shall be much obliged if you will speak to your friend."

"I shall do so, certainly, and then, of course, you could advertise."

"I had thought of that," I said. "Perhaps you could have the advertisement inserted for me in the most appropriate papers."

"But certainly. We will write it together."

*L'Inconnue*, the advertisement read, *please communicate immediately with A. Howard, Hôtel Lorraine, Paris. Matter of life and death.*

Monsieur Michelet, greatly intrigued, promised to insert the note in the Paris newspapers and the *Overseas Daily Mail*. As we made to depart he detained me with a hand on my arm. "For tonight I recommend to you the Bal Tabarin," he said. "There you will see the most beautiful girls in Paris and," he sank his voice to a whisper, "you will see all of them, too. They will make you forget about *l'Inconnue*."

I thanked him and we parted with smiles of mutual esteem. There was nothing that could make me forget about *l'Inconnue*.

In a book-shop in the rue de Rivoli I found an English translation of a book by a French doctor on the use of hypnotism in medicine. The author claimed to have cured thus a number of ills from asthma to homosexuality and believed that hypnotism could be a shining instrument for good. Or a powerful weapon for evil, I thought,

We had an *apéritif* on the terrace of the Carousel, opposite the gilded statue of Joan of Arc, and I scanned the book while Lenore criticized the passers-by. She was wearing a nice little black suit that was part of her trousseau and a saucy white hat she had bought in Paris. It had been one of her ambitions to buy a hat in Paris, but already her delight in the hat had palled. It seemed that this was white hat year in Paris and almost every woman she saw was wearing one.

She brightened when I closed the book and began to count my francs. "Now we can really afford to do Paris," she said.

"Yes, now that we have other things on my mind."

"On my mind, too, Anthony. Describe her for me again. It will help you to remember what she looked like."

"She wasn't wearing a white hat," I teased.

"A distinction in itself," said Lenore, remembering her troubles. "What was she wearing?"

I described *l'Inconnue's* clothes to my complete satisfaction, but not, it seemed, to Lenore's. Women have standards in these matters. "She was dark, you say?" she asked.

"As Egypt's night."

"Pretty?"

"Striking; beautiful, really, and with a determined little chin."

"What colour were her eyes?"

"Blue, I think."

"Only think?"

"She was wearing a necklet of zircons."

"Then they'd be blue all right. Any rings?"

"She was wearing gloves. You think she might be married?"

"Or engaged."

"I don't think she was married, somehow."

"Anthony, how can we find her?"

"I'll find her."

Although Paris has a population of two and three-quarter millions, I began to scan hopefully the faces of all the young and fashionable women who passed the café. The city is divided into twenty arrondissements or districts. I had met *l'Inconnue* in the First Arrondissement and did not mean to stray far from it until I had found her again. There were so many things I had wanted to do in Paris; to explore the Bois de Boulogne and St. Germain des Prés, to climb the Eiffel Tower, to visit Notre Dame and, for I am a keen amateur composer, to see Beethoven's piano in the Conservatoire Museum and the spinet at which Rouget de l'Isle had composed the 'Marseillaise'. But they would have to wait. We were prisoners of the First Arrondissement.

Lenore took the book from my knees and began to look through it. " 'Hypnotism is the artificial production of a state resembling sleep'," she read aloud.

"Elementary, my dear Watson," I murmured, my eyes on the passing parade.

"Here's a bit about a woman who was put into a deep trance in the presence of her husband then told she could open her eyes, but would not awaken. When she opened her eyes the doctor asked if her husband was still in the room and she said she didn't see him. Her husband then spoke to her, but she did not seem to hear his voice and ignored his presence."

"Some wives don't have to be in a trance to do that," I said.

Lenore sighed. "We are down in the dumps, aren't we?" She closed the book and applied herself to her Dubonnet. "This is a lovely drink, we must get it at home."

We had lunch on the terrace of the Café de la Paix, and once again I scanned the faces of the passers-by. Once I thought I saw *l'Inconnue* on the other side of the street and with a muttered word to Lenore, I ran across to her only to find myself gazing into the face of a stranger. I knew the thing was growing into an obsession, but I was powerless to stop it. It is the way I am made.

In the afternoon Lenore suggested we might find *l'Inconnue* at one of the cafés in the Champs Elysées, so we took the Métro to the Rond Point station. The Champs Elysées swarmed with cafés and every café swarmed with patrons. None of the patrons was *l'Inconnue* and, after a while, I saw each face as a meaningless white blur.

Tired and dispirited, we returned to the Métro and I collapsed gratefully into a seat. Not that I had it long. As the train left the station I felt a sharp tap on my shoulder and my heart bounded. She had found me, I thought, and looked up with an eagerness that died instantly away. A girl stood gazing down at me with hauteur and when she saw that my attention had been attracted, she waved some kind of card in my face and dazed me with rapid-fire French. She seemed to be demanding my seat, which I thought rather forward of her. In normal circumstances I would have risen at once, but I was desperately tired and her insistence annoyed me.

Again the tap on the shoulder, then a vicious prod. "Monsieur." The girl's voice was imperious, her manner determined, and then I saw the notice on the window. These seats, it stated, were to be made available on demand for wounded soldiers, aged and infirm persons and pregnant women. Lenore saw the notice at the same time, glanced at the girl and giggled. "You've had it, chum," she said.

I struggled to my feet, stammering an apology. The girl sat down beside Lenore and began happily to knit a small white bootee. Lenore's face was a study in suppressed amusement and I felt my cheeks burn. Every male eye must be on me, I thought, regarding me as little better than a murderer, but when I looked round the car no one was taking the slightest notice.

The car was full and someone close to me had partaken generously of garlic. Against the nearest upright a young couple were embracing, as heedless of their surroundings as their surroundings were heedless of them. Lovers embraced

everywhere in Paris, irrespective of time or place; in the streets, in the cafés, even in the Métro. It was love that made the wheels go round.

At the next station a girl at the back rose to leave the car. She was slim, with jet black hair, her face white as magnolia. My heart leaped. *"L'Inconnue!"* I shouted. "Wait! Don't go! *L'Inconnue!"* I struggled towards her through the press and she turned a surprised face to mine. She was not in the least like *l'Inconnue.*

This time I really had attracted attention. Even the lovers looked at me and I was heartily relieved when the train reached our station and I could stagger out into the fresh air. Lenore caught up with me and slipped her arm in mine. "Anthony, you must stop this. You'll make yourself ill."

I swallowed a sedative tablet and felt better. My doctor had warned me that I was highly strung, that I drove myself too hard and that my nerves were in a shocking state. He knew my past history and kept me supplied with sedatives, insisting that I must never be without them. Recently I had felt that I no longer needed them, but I needed one now.

. . . . .

It was midnight again at the Quai du Louvre, a pocket of silence in the hum of the city's life. There was a fingernail of moon tonight and, downstream, a moored lighter threw a patch of deep shadow across the cobbles. No sound came from her, no light nor any sign of life. Lenore had not spoken for some time and I felt her shiver against me as we stood in the angle of a buttress, close to the spot where *l'Inconnue* had so nearly jumped to her death. "Do you think she'll come tonight?" she asked.

"I wish I knew." A cat slunk across the cobbles, arched its back as at some phantom foe and fled like a black streak. Lenore loathes cats. She imputes to them almost supernatural powers and snuggled close in the protection of my arm. "Do you think it sensed something?" she whispered. "Some presence we can't see?"

We heard the tramp of footsteps farther down the Quai and Lenore went rigid. Then the street lamp on the embankment above revealed the figure of a gendarme and she relaxed.

The gendarme gave us an incurious glance and passed on. "He took us for lovers," said Lenore.

"Well, aren't we?" She squeezed my hand. A chill little breeze sprang up from the river, ruffled her shining hair and was gone. The silence closed in.

I looked at the black river, flowing so quietly to the sea, and conceived the romantic notion that tears had nourished it; the tears of all the star-crossed lovers from the beginning of time. Lenore and I both had memories of past loves, mine bitter sweet, hers only bitter. I had loved my first wife dearly and mourned her for many sunless years. Even now I could not think of her without tears springing to my eyes. Lenore's first husband had been a scoundrel and had died as he deserved. We seldom spoke of the past but Lenore, sensing my mood, spoke of it now.

"Anthony," she said quietly, "I know that you still remember."

"Does one ever forget one's first love?"

"I wouldn't have it otherwise so long as you don't forget your last love."

I kissed her. "You're very sweet," I said. I looked again at the river and saw something white and formless float by with the current. Driftwood, perhaps, or other flotsam, but for a moment my imagination gave it the semblance of a body; perhaps the spirit of that other *Inconnue* who had found death here more than thirty years ago.

Time passed and nothing happened. The gendarme came back, walking with measured tread, but this time he did not look at us. The darkness swallowed him and we were alone again, alone with the night and the stars and a deep sense of foreboding. Then, not far away, footsteps again; quick, light footsteps on the embankment above. "Rubber soles," I whispered.

A shadow fell across the cobbles and looking up we saw a man walking smartly towards us on the upper level. He was slim and not over tall, wearing a black overcoat, black soft hat with the brim pulled well down and black gloves. He passed under the lamplight, but we could make out nothing of his features for his chin was sunk in a white silk muffler. For a second he paused, seeming to look down at us, and as I glanced up, the light fell on my face. His black glasses seemed to

glitter in an oddly sinister manner then he was gone, walking still with that quick, assured and almost silent tread.

"No sale," I said.

Lenore clutched my arm. "Anthony, suppose he was the man!"

"The man?"

"He looked at us and then hurried away. Suppose *l'Inconnue* challenged him with what he had tried to do to her. Suppose she told him about you. Suppose he came tonight to see if you would be here, if you were still taking an interest."

"Let's see where he goes," I said, and hurried up the steps. But when I reached the embankment the figure in the black overcoat had gone. He was probably just a passer-by, I decided, and we returned to our buttress.

A few moments later, a man sauntered along the Quai towards us, paused opposite us and came over. He was tall and lean, dressed in a stained waterproof and a wide-brimmed hat. His eyes were black smudges in his gaunt, white face. "Is it possible that you are Monsieur Howard?" he asked in passable English.

"Quite possible."

"I am Inspector Damien of the Sûreté. Monsieur Michelet told me of your little adventure. And this is Madame Howard? Enchanted. I thought you might come tonight, but it is not necessary and I beg you not to derange yourselves. I have set a watch."

"Was it one of your men who passed a few moments ago, wearing a black coat and black glasses?"

"No. I saw no one of that description."

"He was on the upper embankment."

"He was of no importance, then, depend upon it. I have men hidden on that lighter and if your dark lady appears they will see she comes to no harm. So go home to bed, Monsieur Howard, and Madame. Everything marches."

"If anything should happen, you will let me know?"

"Certainly; I will seek you out at your hotel, but first, describe to me this lady."

I gave him a detailed description of *l'Inconnue* and he nodded. "Excellent. I can see you are accustomed to this type of work. I have heard of you, of course." He stroked his long

chin. "*L'Inconnue de la Seine.* Eh! It is a quaint conceit, that. We will attend to it."

We gave him good night and, there being nothing else for it, returned to our hotel. We had a sense of anticlimax and did not speak much, but in bed Lenore clung to me with a sort of desperate urgency, as if, like Romeo, I must be gone before morning. Afterwards, she murmured sleepily, "Did you know the Spaniards call it *la muerte chiquita*, the little death?"

"Six days on the Costa Brava and you're a linguist," I said. She did not answer me and I knew that she was asleep.

The night wore on. I heard a clock outside strike two, three, then four and still sleep eluded me. Where was *l'Inconnue* at this moment? Safe in bed or still in the shadow of danger? Was she already dead? What more could I have done for her? In what way had I failed her? The little death had brought a temporary release from tension, but after the little death life goes on.

Next morning my advertisement was in the paper and we waited in till lunch-time, hoping for some reaction, but there was none. Lenore had an appointment at three with a hairdresser in the Boulevard Madeleine, and I escorted her there, arranging to meet her again at five at the Café de la Paix. The morning papers had carried no tale of drowning and I walked about looking unseeingly in shop windows, feverishly waiting till the evening papers would be on the streets.

At last, I heard a newsboy calling on the other side of the Place de l'Opéra and paused on the edge of the pavement, waiting a chance to cross. It was an exceptionally busy crossing and the traffic seemed endless, streams of cars converging from every direction, urged on by a demented gendarme in a sort of lookout post above the street. Pedestrians and traffic seemed to be moving much too quickly, as in one of the old Keystone comic films, and the cars seemed to be taking an insane delight in the traditional Paris game of pedestrian chasing.

As I stepped off the pavement, a taxi swung round the corner, coming fast. I thought I could beat it, however, and quickened my step to cross its path. That was the moment someone chose to try to murder me.

## CHAPTER THREE

# FOUND

I STILL believe that my game leg saved my life, that and the inborn skill of the Paris taxi driver. Had I been able to move a little faster I could have fallen right in front of the taxi, but as it was, when my heels were clicked from behind, I went down immediately, sprawling at length in the gutter.

I heard the frantic screeching of brakes, shouts and screams, the prolonged and angry blowing of a whistle, a cacophony of horns. The nearside front wheel of the taxi brushed my fingers and then I was surrounded by a press of people all talking and gesticulating at once. Someone helped me up and I stood swaying in the circle of bystanders. My head was ringing and my leg ached with a furious pain. It had recovered from the previous wrenching, but now it was giving me hell.

"Say, you O.K.?" The man who had helped me to my feet had his arm about my shoulders. Apart from his accent and his clothes, I would have known him to be an American for his face had the expensive pallor of one reared, like a rare orchid, in an atmosphere of central heating.

"I'm fine," I assured him. "Someone clicked my heels just as I stepped off the pavement. Did you see who it was?"

He shook his head. "There were dozens of folks all round you, waiting to cross. I didn't see a thing."

"You didn't see a man in dark glasses and a dark overcoat?"

"Nope. I saw no one like that."

I looked around me at the ring of faces, derisive, sympathetic, excited, curious. No, there was no one like that, no one I recognized, no one who looked in the least like a potential murderer. The traffic was stopped, the gendarme had come down from his eyrie and was cursing the taxi driver who was gibbering like a maniac. The gendarme delivered one last salvo and turned to me. "*Anglais?*" I nodded. "You are not hurt?"

"No."

"Next time be more careful." He yelled at the crowd who melted reluctantly away, mounted to his control tower, blew his whistle and waved his white baton like a distracted Punch. The traffic flowed on as if nothing had happened, restoring the street to the normal condition of bedlam and, limping to the side of a building, I leaned against it and waited for the agony in my leg to die down. The pain made it difficult to think coherently.

The American was still beside me. "Sure you don't need help?" he asked.

I nodded. "I've got a game leg," I told him. "Be all right in a minute."

"War wound, huh?"

"Yes."

"Where'd you get it?"

"At sea."

"British Navy?"

"Yes."

"Was in the U.S. Marines myself, Guadalcanal, Okinawa, the whole Pacific shooting match. Never got so much as a scratch. Say, you could use a drink."

I let him assist me to an adjacent café and we got acquainted over a Pernod. His name was Jesse Cordiner and he came from New Orleans. In the next few minutes I got his family history, but none of it has stayed with me, and I never learned what he was doing in Paris. "When you said someone clicked your heels, you didn't mean on purpose?" he asked.

"That's how it seemed to me."

He shook his head in patent disbelief. "Guess you imagined it, sailor. Someone tripped you accidentally, was all. There were so many bunched up at the crossing it could easily have happened."

"Perhaps you're right," I said wearily. There was no point in arguing. Whoever had done it hadn't waited to be identified and, under cover of the crowd, the act of tripping me up could easily have gone unnoticed. It had been nicely timed and had come within an ace of being successful.

I parted from Cordiner after the second drink, remembered the newspaper and secured one from a passing boy. It contained no news of interest, no murders, no suicides, no unexplained deaths. There was every chance that *l'Inconnue*

was still alive but, after the attack on me, it seemed pretty obvious she was living on borrowed time.

I was still conning the newspaper on the terrace of the Café de la Paix, with occasional aid from a pocket French dictionary, when Lenore arrived. She was radiant, for the setting of her hair had been accomplished by an artist, and she had garnered many admiring looks of which mine was not the least.

She sniffed suspiciously at my glass. "What are you drinking?"

"Pernod."

"Isn't that frightfully intoxicating?"

"It is. It is my third this afternoon, but I am not frightfully intoxicated."

"Clever boy. You look a bit peaked, though."

"I slipped and wrenched my leg."

"Oh, darling, what a shame! Is it bad?"

"I'll live," I said, and immediately felt as if someone was walking over my grave. I am not normally superstitious, but it is unwise to tempt Providence and, surreptitiously, I touched wood under the table.

I did not want to tell Lenore about the attempt on my life, for it would only have upset her. She had said that no one wanted the shadow of death across a honeymoon, but I hated keeping anything from her and the feeling of guilt made me irritable.

"Anything in the paper?" she asked.

"No."

"Anything exciting been happening?"

"No."

"Do you mind if I have a Pernod, too?"

"No."

"Nobody could mistake you for a yes man, could they?"

"Sorry." I signalled the waiter and ordered her a Pernod. She watched me, a frown wrinkling her normally smooth forehead.

"Is your leg very painful?"

"Not after three Pernods."

"We'd better take a taxi to the hotel."

"Nonsense, it's no distance, and walking's good for me."

"I was beginning to wonder if anything was good for you."

She drank her Pernod much too quickly and stood up. "Shall we go, then? I know what's troubling you; you're wondering if there's been an answer to your advertisement."

"I'd forgotten the advertisement," I said with truth.

As we crossed to the avenue de l'Opéra, she took my arm. "Goodness, I'm giddy. What makes you so impervious to Pernod?"

"Fifteen years in the Navy," I said.

My leg still hurt damnably, but I managed to conceal that fact from Lenore who, after all, was used to seeing me limp. As we turned into the street where our hotel was, she said irritably, "Why do you keep looking behind you?"

"I didn't realize I was looking behind me."

"You're as jumpy as a cat. Take another of your tablets."

"To hell with my tablets."

She sighed. "Paris, where every prospect pleases, and only husbands are vile."

"Sorry, darling," I apologized. "I'm a boorish swine today. I didn't sleep well last night."

At once she was all contrition, which made me feel guiltier than ever. Suppose my phantom assailant struck again and this time succeeded. What would become of Lenore?

I asked at the desk if there were any letters, expecting a negative reply and could hardly believe it when the porter handed me a small white envelope. It was addressed somewhat derisively, *Private Detective Anthony Howard*, in thin, spidery writing. I ripped it open with shaking fingers and withdrew a flimsy sheet of notepaper.

*Please don't be silly*, I read. *Am perfectly all right and going home tomorrow. L'Inconnue.*

I handed the note to Lenore. "So she really does exist," she commented.

"So it would seem."

"And she's all right."

"She says so, she may even think so."

"But you don't think so?"

"No."

"At least you've got a sample of her handwriting."

"If it isn't disguised."

"You're going on with it, then?"

"Yes, Lenore. I'm sorry. It's just—something I have to do."

She squeezed my arm. "Darling, I think you're perfectly right." On which note of harmony we went up to our room.

We dined at Maxim's. *L'Inconnue* had seemed the type who would frequent the fashionable restaurants, but tonight she must have chosen another one. It was a memorable meal and we lingered over it, then we went to the café where I had taken *l'Inconnue*. I got hold of the same waiter and asked him if he remembered us. He did. Had he ever seen the girl before? He had not. Would he ask the other waiters? He would and did. The other waiters did not know her. No one knew her.

Midnight found us again at the Quai du Louvre where we were joined by Inspector Damien. He came out of the darkness like a disembodied shadow and I handed him *l'Inconnue's* message. He read it by the light of his torch, folded it carefully and placed it in his wallet. "So it ends well," he said, "and you were mistaken after all. She must have had some kind of brainstorm; a *crise de nerfs*. You are a romantic, Monsieur Howard. You write *romans policiers* and you see life as a *roman policier*. That is it, no?"

I shrugged. What was the use? If I told him about the attempt to kill me, he would dismiss it with the same air of superior knowledge. It was an accident. It could easily happen. I saw life as a *roman policier* and invested quite ordinary situations with sinister significance. To hell with him, I thought. To hell with all of them. I felt like an eagle beating its wings against the bars of a cage.

"You'll maintain the watch for tonight?" I asked.

"Just for tonight."

"If you should encounter a man wearing a black hat and coat, white scarf and dark glasses, could you find out who he is and send word to me? I would like to know."

The inspector laughed and clapped me patronizingly on the back. "A figure of evil, eh? A stock character in your mysteries? Depend upon it, he is some clerk who has ruined his eyesight by working long hours in a poor light. Go home, Monsieur Howard, relax and forget or you, too, will have a *crise de nerfs*."

"He's got a point there," said Lenore, tugging at my arm. "Let's go."

We went back to the hotel and bed, but once again sleep eluded me. *L'Inconnue* must have challenged her Svengali; must have revealed that she was wise. Perhaps she had threatened to tell me, she might even have said that she had already told me and so I, too, was marked for death. In inserting that advertisement I had stuck my neck out.

After an early breakfast I went round to the garage for the Rolls. The Rolls has dignity and grace, a commanding turn of speed and I am boyishly proud of it. Although a recent acquisition, it is far from new—vintage 1938, in fact—but it impresses the clients and nothing succeeds like the appearance of success. I draw my clients from the ever shrinking circle of the well to do and take care to have the Rolls seen in all the best places. It is black, upholstered in pale blue leather and faced with French walnut. It has everything an aristocrat should have and the garage owner, who had fallen in love with it too, had had it polished till it shone like a black mirror in the sunlight.

Our way led out of Paris by the Avenue des Champs Elysées, the Boulevard de la Grande Armée, and the Porte de Neuilly, and at that time in the morning we had a fairly easy passage. "Won't we be much too early?" asked Lenore.

"We're going to Calais *via* Le Touquet."

"Le Touquet! But *l'Inconnue* came *from* Le Touquet. She won't be there now."

"No, but her photograph may be."

"Her photograph!"

"I'd like a walking picture of you," I sang merrily, and Lenore caught on.

"No wonder you're such a good detective," she commented. "Nobody could say you weren't thorough."

I took one of my instinctive dislikes to Le Touquet. The beach was a magnificent sweep of sand, but the front, generally, was tawdry and the fashionable quarter, set well back to avoid being contaminated by day trippers, lorded it in lonely grandeur among the pinewoods.

We found three walking picture kiosks and I said my piece in each of them. I was looking for a young lady who had had a walking picture taken and could I look at the photographs in

their files? It was, they would understand, an affair of the heart. This explanation sufficed, aided by a little largesse accepted in the spirit in which it was offered. I looked at hundreds and hundreds of simpering wenches in everything from exiguous swim-suits to lush evening-dresses, but *l'Inconnue* was not among them. At least it had been worth a try.

The Rolls devoured the kilometres to Calais and we caught the car ferry with ten minutes to spare. It was an exhilarating drive and I felt almost happy. To drive a powerful car at speed, to play the piano, to hit a golf ball as far as it can be hit: these are the three chief pleasures of my life, these are the times when I am relaxed, when I forget I am a prisoner in a pitiless world.

I prowled through the steamer from end to end, but *l'Inconnue* was not aboard. She was the type who would be more likely to fly, I thought, for the sake of the champagne lunch. Perhaps I should have waited a little and checked at Le Bourget Airport. I pictured her relaxing in a well-upholstered seat of an Air France Epicurean, side by side with her would-be murderer; still unconscious, perhaps, of her danger. She would be vulnerable in the air. How difficult would it be to stage an accident?

The crossing was uneventful, the Customs co-operative, the run to London an undiluted joy. The Costa Brava had been colourful, the Riviera gay, Paris a dream, but there is a feeling about coming home to one's own country that is like no other feeling in the world. It touches the deepest springs of emotion, and I am an emotional type. My great sorrow over Eve's death has made me so and there were tears in my eyes when we drew up at our new flat in Portland Place.

It was an imposing flat with spacious rooms and lofty ceilings and it went very well with the Rolls. It had once belonged to a former best seller writer of thrillers and when I had signed the lease I had hoped that part, at least, of his mantle might fall upon me. A number of ribald friends and relations had gathered to greet us, a fire had been lit in the music-room, a meal had been prepared and altogether it was quite a homecoming.

When the last self-invited guest had gone, I sat down at the piano and began to play. When I am in stress of mind

nothing relaxes me like piano music. It clarifies my thoughts, renews my hopes, soothes me like a cool hand on a fevered brow. In Paris I had longed for my piano as a pregnant woman longs for strawberries out of season.

Lenore came in and sat by the fireplace as quiet as a mouse. It was good to know that she was there, that there was someone who trusted me and loved me. I paused at last and turned to her with a smile.

"You have a wonderful gift," she said softly, "and it brings you such peace. I think you'd die without your piano."

I went over and sat on the rug at her feet. "I'm going to find that girl," I proclaimed. "I know it now and I've got the strangest feeling I'll find her through a photograph."

"You've thought of something, then?"

"The society journals. She's just the type to have her photograph in the *Tatler* or the *Illustrated London News*. Tomorrow I'm going to look through the files."

Next morning I went early to my office in Fenton Street. Since my first case I had branched out a bit and now had a staff of five; two male operatives, two smart typists and Ambrose, the office boy. They were all looking busy when I walked in and they seemed genuinely pleased to see me, which I thought nice of them. There were one or two routine matters pending, a lost husband ('come back and all will be forgiven'), a suspected insurance swindle and a jewel robbery—one of those cases where all the owner wants is her property back and no questions asked. West thought he had a line on it and I told him to carry on. Since acquiring the Rolls I only do the murders.

West was my senior assistant, young, keen, talented and, what was even more valuable, persistent. I told him I'd be busy for a few days and would 'phone in from time to time to learn what was doing. He looked surprised, but offered no comment.

I had meant to leave again immediately, but it was not so easy as that. By some uncanny percipience, people seemed to have divined that I was back and the telephone kept ringing. My literary agent had a vague hint of a film offer for one of my books, a voluble woman wanted me to find her pedigree poodle (the dear Countess of Middlerigg had recommended me) and the earnest secretary of a Rotary Club begged me to give a talk on crime detection.

I am a Rotarian myself, and there are days when I am as full of love for my fellow men as a good Rotarian is supposed to be, but this was not one of them. I gave instructions that no more calls were to be put through and then, before I could each for my hat, a man penetrated to my private office by posing as a client and tried to sell me life insurance. He was so insistent it would have served him right if I had bought some. He couldn't know what a damn bad risk I was.

At last I got clear and spent the rest of the forenoon in Fleet Street, gazing at the photographs of society beauties and social climbers in the back files of glossy magazines. I saw them at Ascot, at the Boat Race, at point-to-points, hunt balls, dinner parties and charity dances. I saw them looking animated when their horses had won and downcast when they had lost, saw them prattling in buffets to eligible partners; mouths too wide open, lipstick on the rim of the wineglass, enough jewellery to stock Cartiers for a year. I saw them all, from debutantes to dowagers, till I could see nothing but row upon row of vapid faces. But I did not see the Unknown of the Seine.

When, at last, I turned the Rolls homeward, my head was bursting and it took a good half-hour at the piano to soothe me down. There had been no letters, no messages, nothing. A thoroughly discouraging forenoon.

After lunch I went back to the piano and, gradually, to the rippling music of Chopin, a new idea began to take shape in my mind. I stopped playing and stared into space, then Lenore said, "What have you got?"

"I've been going over the conversation I had with her," I said, "over it and over it to see if I could hit on anything significant. Two names stand out; Gleneagles and Le Touquet."

"Golf and gambling," commented Lenore.

"Perhaps, but Le Touquet is noted for other things than gambling. It has a golf course, too, quite a famous one and, if I remember rightly, it housed a big professional tournament last week, while *l'Inconnue* was there. She had a little golfing mascot, remember? Her luck piece she called it."

"So?"

"So this afternoon I look at the golfing journals."

. . . . .

The golfing journals yielded a crop of amazons who looked as if they would be more at home on a battlefield than a golf course. They were shown bashing out of bunkers, breasting fairways like ships in full sail, swinging drivers with a follow through down to their heels, posing lumpily in front of sumptuous clubhouses. It was enough to destroy one's faith in womanhood.

After a couple of hours of this, the search took me to the editorial offices of *Down the Fairway*. This was a new publication which claimed a certain originality, but carried the same type of picture. The editor, Teddy Brooks, was a friend of mine and, as the bars had not yet opened, he was in his office and condescended to stop practising putting on the carpet long enough to accord me an interview.

When the preliminaries were over I said, "Teddy, I'm looking for a girl."

"And you just back from your honeymoon! How was it, by the way?

"Wonderful."

"I was playing with a chap last Saturday who had just returned from his honeymoon. The thirteenth hole at our club adjoins a field where, if I may phrase it delicately, one occasionally sees goings on and on Saturday I happened to glance over the hedge and there was a couple—you know. I nudged old Bill and he took one look and said, 'I'd rather have a pie.' Just back from his honeymoon, too. Can you beat it?"

"I didn't come here to listen to your Rabelaisian reminiscences," I said, "but to try and find this girl. You know who's who in the golfing world and you may be able to place her."

I described *l'Inconnue* as minutely as I could, but he only shook his head. "Doesn't sound like a woman golfer to me, old man. You should just see some of them."

"She's interested in golf, anyway," I said. "I'm pretty sure of that."

"She might be a camp follower. Some of the stars have girls who follow them round religiously at every tournament. It's getting talked about. I know one succulent wench who even carries the clubs of a well-known amateur. She does other things for him, too, if rumour doesn't lie. Been looking at our photographs?"

"Yes; no joy."

"Don't look at the players, look at the spectators."

"You may have got something there," I said. "Did you take any photographs of that Le Touquet tournament?"

"Lots of them, but we haven't decided which ones to print yet. We're a monthly and we don't go to press till Friday."

"Could I see them?"

"Of course." He rang for the photographs and I seized them with hands that trembled. They were clear glossy prints and I did not need the magnifying glass he offered. The first print showed a roped off tee with spectators crowding close to watch a determined-looking man drive off. In the background slouched his caddie, an evil-faced cretin if ever I saw one and over to the left, in a favoured position inside the ropes, a girl in a tartan skirt and light-coloured twin set sat on a shooting stick. She was *l'Inconnue de la Seine*.

"By all the Gods in heaven!" I exclaimed. "I've found her."

I pushed the photograph across to Teddy. My hands were trembling violently, but a paean of triumph was ringing in my mind. With nothing to go on but two place names and a brooch shaped like a golfer, I had struck my dark lady's trail.

Teddy studied the photograph, cupping his chin in his hands. "She's a smasher all right. You can pick them!"

"Who is she?"

"Haven't a clue, old boy."

"Who's the man?"

"Golf's latest personality, Charles Rohan. You've heard of him, of course?"

"Yes, they call him the French Cotton, don't they? He won this tournament if I remember rightly."

"In a canter. He's won a lot of tournaments in the last eighteen months, yet two years ago no one had ever heard of him. A few years ago he taught English in a Paris school, then he got interested in some Deaf and Dumb Mission, learned the dummy alphabet and taught there in the evenings. That was his downfall."

"How?"

"Well, it seems he taught his day school class the dummy alphabet and when the inspector came and asked questions the class couldn't answer, he used to get behind the inspector and tell them the answers on his fingers. He had the reputation

of having the brightest class in the school until one day the inspector turned round unexpectedly. So he gave up teaching."

"Is that really true?"

"It's supposed to be, but it could be one of those things the publicity boys think up. There were other things that helped end his teaching career. Some of the girls in his class were rather well developed for their age group—need I go on?"

"You can skip that bit. What did he do next?"

"He went to America and made a good living as a stage hypnotist until——"

"He what!"

"That registers something, does it?"

"I'll say it does. Go on."

"Until something went wrong with one of his tricks. Don't know what it was, but there was a bit of a scandal and he had to quit the stage. He'd always been a keen golfer, remarkably proficient, too—natural talent for the game—and he entered for one of the U.S. open tournaments and won it. Beat some of the top-ranking pros on their own stamping ground. After that he took up the game professionally and went from strength to strength. He's made up his mind to win this year's British Open Championship and I think he can do it."

"He won't win next year's," I said darkly.

"Why not?"

"He may not be around." I picked up the photograph and looked at the girl's hands through the magnifying glass. No rings.

Teddy had another look, too. "Lovely young filly," he said. "Must be his latest acquisition."

"Second latest," I said. "I've some reason to believe he's got tired of this one. Villainous-looking caddie he's chosen."

"That's Absalom, an Arab from Algiers. He's a deaf mute. Don't know where Rohan got hold of him, his Deaf and Dumb Mission, probably, but Absalom caddies for him at all the tournaments. Follows him about like a dog, in fact."

"Bodyguard?"

"He's hardly got the physique for that. Let's say a Fidus Achates."

I studied Rohan's face. He had sharp, well-defined features, a pointed chin, a grim mouth. He looked a ruthless type, a man who would go after what he wanted, horse, foot and guns.

He was good-looking, too, and would definitely appeal to women.

Teddy pointed to a man standing behind the ropes among the spectators on Rohan's left. "That's his brother, Maurice," he said. "He's a doctor, some kind of specialist in medical hypnotism. I expect that's where Charles learned it. He has another brother, Gilles, who's a doctor, too. Gilles is married to a doctor and they have a flourishing practice in Rouen."

"Do they use hypnotism, too?"

"Not that I know of. They're G.P.'s, but Maurice is a consultant. Taking them all round they're a talented and well-favoured family. I believe they're known as the Handsome Rohans."

"The Open Championship's being played next week, isn't it? Somewhere in the north?"

"Yes, at Fairlake, on the Lancashire coast; near Blackpool. Know it?"

"I've never played on it, but I've heard it's a marvellous course."

"Pretty stiff test. What's your handicap these days?"

"Two."

"You went in for the Open once yourself, didn't you?"

"Years ago," I said, "but I failed to qualify. I haven't played much until recently because of my leg."

"You should take a run up to Fairlake and have a look at Rohan. Believe me, he's worth watching."

"Don't worry," I said grimly. "I'll be there."

## CHAPTER FOUR

# A ROHAN AT PLAY

I WENT straight to the office and called in West who is an intelligent young man and keeps abreast of the news. "What do you know about Charles Rohan?" I asked.

"A hot tip for this year's Open, sir."

"I wouldn't bet on it," I said. "I want all the dope on him you can get and I want it quick. I particularly want to know if he was in Paris during the last four days and that goes for his brothers, Dr. Maurice and Dr. Gilles Rohan—oh, and Gilles Rohan's wife. Charles was a stage hypnotist in the States, but there was an incident that compelled him to give it up. I want the full story of that, too."

"Will it be O.K. to cable our French and U.S. agents?"

"Too slow. 'Phone them."

"A new case, sir?"

"In a way, yes."

"It must carry a fat allowance for expenses."

"The expenses will be met from my private account," I told him. He stared at me as if he thought I had gone clean round the bend. Perhaps he was right. "It's a matter of life and death, West, so get cracking on it. I'm going up to Fairlake for the Championship and I'll let you know as soon as I can where to locate me."

"I understand, sir." He didn't, of course, but he knew when the heat was turned on. His not to reason why. When he had gone, I took down the appropriate volume of the *Encyclopædia Britannica* for the name of Rohan had struck a chord in my memory. The Rohans had written some shining pages in the long history of France, and I wondered if Charles and his brothers could be any connection.

The name derived, I read, from a small town in Morbihan and the family claimed connection with the ancient sovereigns of Brittany. Henri, the first Duc de Rohan, had been a soldier, a man of letters and leader of the Huguenots. His military career had been distinguished and he had died in battle in 1638. Another member of the family, the Chevalier de

Rohan, had conspired with the Dutch against Louis XIV and was beheaded in Paris in 1674, and a third was that Cardinal Rohan who had been involved innocently, it was believed, with the Countess la Motte in the fraudulent affair of Marie Antoinette's diamond necklace.

It was a far cry from seventeenth-century military campaigns and eighteenth-century court intrigues to golf championships and hypnotic tricks, but times had changed since the age of chivalry.

I drove home whistling, gave a mocking salute to the imposing headquarters of the B.B.C. across the way, and literally charged into the house. "Success!" I shouted. Lenore came running and, with arms round each other, we went into the music-room and collapsed on the couch.

I produced the photograph which Teddy Brooks had permitted me to keep. "There she is," I proclaimed, "*l'Inconnue* in person."

Lenore studied the photograph. "Yes, she does look striking. Have you got her name?"

"Not yet."

"Who's the man?"

"Charles Rohan, the new golf star."

"She's in love with him."

"Is that based on observation or instinct?"

"Both. Look at the expression on her face. He's just driven off but she isn't caring tuppence where the ball has gone. She's gazing at him."

I had seen that rapt look on the faces of women before. It is as unmistakable as it is wonderful. It makes a man proud where it should make him humble. "You're right," I agreed. "Rohan, by the way, was a stage hypnotist once."

Lenore's eyes widened. "Not really! You know, it's amazing how everything seems to be working out the way you expected. It's been a pleasure to watch you at work. Most impressive. What do you do next?"

"Watch some golf and that's where you come in. You were in the hotel business for long enough so you ought to be able to get us accommodation in Fairlake; the same hotel as Rohan, if possible."

"Fairlake in Lancashire?"

"Yes, the Open Golf Championship's on there next week and Rohan is competing. She'll be there to watch."

"Every hotel will be crammed."

"Haven't you any influence?"

She smiled at me. "I might have, darling. We'll just see, shall we?" She went to the telephone and dialled the exchange. "Now you can watch *me* at work," she said.

She gave a number, placed a hand over the mouthpiece, and said to me: "This is the best hotel in the place so it's odds on your Charles Rohan will be staying there if he can afford it. The French are so particular about their food." She broke off. "Hallo? Marathon Hotel? Could I speak to Miss Beamish, please?" Again a wait. "You'll like Betty Beamish. She's the hostess. Hallo! Betty? This is Lenore Gabriel, Lenore Howard now. You remember the Angel of Light? How are you, darling?"

For the next three minutes there was a great deal of cooing, then Lenore said: "Look, is Charles Rohan staying with you? He's there now? Splendid! My husband and I are very keen to watch him play in the Open. Could you possibly put us up? When from?" She looked at me, eyebrows raised.

"Tomorrow," I said.

"From tomorrow till the Championship is over. Yes, I know it's difficult, but it's frightfully important to my husband. You'll like him, Betty. He's really awfully nice."

"Spare my blushes," I murmured.

"Well, could you sort of push us up to the head of the queue? You will? Darling, that's terribly sweet of you. I'm looking forward tremendously to seeing you again."

The conversation degenerated into further cooing, then Lenore rang off and turned to me. "They can take us at the Marathon till Saturday," she said. "After that there's a waiting list for cancellations, but Betty will give us first preference. If there are no cancellations she'll try and fix us up somewhere else in Fairlake."

"We'll pray for cancellations," I said. "Did she say Rohan was there now?"

"She did. He arrived yesterday and he's been practising hard."

"Any followers?"

"She didn't say. Let me fix you a drink, darling. You deserve a celebration."

The celebration took the shape of gin and Dubonnet with a twist of lemon peel. We clinked glasses. "To *l'Inconnue de la Seine*," said Lenore, then she raised her glass to me, "and to her champion."

After dinner I called on Philip Carter, my doctor, who lives in nearby Wimpole Street, and whom I hold in high esteem. He is in the early forties, with attractively greying hair, a confidence-inspiring face and an impeccable taste in clothes. Among the many things I owe him is my life.

"Ever go in for hypnotism?" I asked.

"Not personally, but I've seen it done more than once. I particularly remember a case of phantom pregnancy——"

"No horrors," I protested. "Is hypnotism the prerogative of a few specially gifted men or can anyone learn to do it?"

"Any intelligent man could learn the technique but some are more gifted than others. In the hands of a quack or a layman, of course, it could be dangerous."

"I suppose some people are more susceptible than others, go into a deeper trance and so on?"

"Yes, high strung people like yourself make the worst subjects, but given a comfy armchair or couch, semi-darkness and a persuasive voice and an expert could hypnotize almost anyone."

"The patient has to co-operate, of course?"

"Normally, yes, but a really skilled man—and they are few—can hypnotize a patient against his will or even without the patient knowing he's being hypnotized."

"Do women make good subjects?"

"As a rule they do. Hypnotism has been used most successfully in gynaecology. Why the interest? Another case?"

"Not exactly," I said, "but it might be if something isn't done about it." I told him the story of *l'Inconnue* and he listened without an interruption, watching me all the time with grave, intelligent eyes. When I had finished he searched his pockets for his pipe, took his time about filling and lighting it, then he said, "If it's what you suspect, it's pretty devilish."

"Is it feasible?"

"Perfectly."

"Up till this afternoon I had nothing to go on, but now

I have four perfectly good suspects; Charles Rohan himself, his two brothers—who are doctors—and the wife of one of them, who is also a doctor."

"Doctors haven't the monopoly of hypnotism, you know."

"I concede that, but Maurice Rohan is apparently an expert."

"He is. His reputation is international, so much so that I can't see him using hypnotism for purposes of murder. I think Charles is your best bet."

"That's what I feel myself."

"Well, it does you good to have plenty to occupy your mind. I haven't seen you looking so cheerful for a long time. How's the leg, by the way?"

"Fine. It survived a couple of nasty wrenches in Paris." I forbore to mention that one of the wrenches had been sustained in an attempt to murder me.

Carter grinned. "Must have been a strenuous honeymoon."

"For a healer you have an astonishingly low mind," I said.

"Talking of minds, do you still agonize over the death of your first wife?"

I shook my head. "Not nearly to the same extent."

"You think you're cured?"

"Yes, only . . ." I paused.

"Only what?"

"Since Eve's death I can't bear the thought of any woman as young and sweet as she was losing her life."

"I see. Psychology is not my field, but it's easy to see what you're doing. You're identifying this girl, this Unknown of the Seine, with Eve. You failed to save Eve and you feel you've got to save this one. That's dangerous, Anthony. It could set you off again."

"I don't think so," I said. "The only thing that might set me off again is if I should have to look upon the face of a girl, this girl or any other girl, young and beautiful and—dead."

He looked solemn. "If that should happen," he said slowly, "I want you to promise me one thing."

"What?"

"That you'll go straight to Lenore."

"I promise."

"Lenore's your salvation, Anthony, your sheet anchor. You love her, don't you?"

"Of course."

"Then remember that she loves you, too. That she needs you just as much as you need her. She doesn't want a husband who's a raving lunatic, so keep a grip on your emotions and don't surrender yourself to your demon."

"I have my demon under full control," I assured him. I stood up. "Thanks, Philip, for listening. You're a sheet anchor, too."

When I returned home, Lenore was packing a suitcase in the bedroom, to be ready for an early start. When her back was turned, I unlocked a drawer of my desk, took out a loaded automatic pistol and slipped it into one of the pockets in the lining of the case. After Paris, I was taking no chances.

Next morning, however, there was a minor crisis. When I came back to the bedroom, Lenore was standing with the automatic in her hand and a worried look on her face. I might have known she would do some last minute rummaging in the suitcase to see that everything was there. "What's this, Anthony?" she asked.

"What does it look like?"

"Why are you taking it?"

"Insurance."

"But why the secrecy? You must have slipped it in last night when I wasn't looking. Do you really think you may need it?"

"Who knows?" I said.

"You're keeping something back from me and I hate that, Anthony. You said in Paris that you would never shut me out, but that's just what you're doing. I can sense it. What happened to you in Paris that I don't know about?"

"Someone tried to shove me under a taxi," I revealed. It wasn't any use. It would have been worse now not to have told her. I poured it all out and her face went very pale. Then, without a word, she put the gun back in the case.

"Don't worry about it," I advised. "It's an occupational hazard."

"If it was any use pleading with you, I'd go down on my knees," she said, "but I know better. You and your compassion for the human race. It's a good thing I kept my widow's weeds." She was trying to put a brave face on it, but her voice trembled.

"I'll be very careful," I promised.

She took my hand and raised it to her lips. There was a pathos about the gesture that made my heart turn over. "Dear Anthony," she said, "you care too much about people, but there are so many who do not care at all. I wouldn't have you different."

. . . . .

The Rolls made light of the journey north in spite of the rolling English roads and the traffic-choked streets of some of the drabbest industrial towns I had ever seen. We reached Fairlake at three o'clock and I liked the place at sight. It had an air about it, an air of holiday with a purpose. The shopping centre was a well-designed square with trim gardens in the centre and most of the shops had glass canopies and hanging flower baskets. The pier had been built with dignity and restraint, there were impressive dunes and a sweep of sandy beach that seemed to stretch almost to the horizon. When the tide went out at Fairlake, it really made a job of it and the pier, long though it was, had its feet in dry sand.

The Marathon Hotel was a huge caravanserai of red brick that might have been a factory but for its festive air. It was embellished with striped sunblinds and surrounded by close-cut lawns studded with tables set under orange umbrellas. A courtyard had been lined off as a car park, but at the moment there were few cars in it.

An emaciated porter staggered in front of us with our bags, and in the pillared hallway a plump young woman in black came forward and embraced Lenore. They babbled for a few moments then the plump young woman gave me a quick once over. "So this is the clever husband?"

"How do you do, Miss Beamish?" I said.

"Call me Betty, love. Practically everybody calls me Betty." A small boy appeared at her side as if by magic and she bent as he whispered shyly into her ear. "Just along the corridor, love. Can you go yourself or would you like this gentleman to take you?"

The child looked at me disparagingly. "Of course I can go myself," he declared, and trotted happily away down the corridor.

"Kids," said Betty with affection. "The place is full of

them and the extra milk we have to get for them you wouldn't believe. Hope you don't mind."

Lenore reassured her and she turned to me. "Well, love, crime takes a holiday. Or does it?"

"I hope so," I murmured.

Betty switched to Lenore. "Doesn't talk much, does he? Not like me, I just go on for ever. My middle name's Brook." She looked at me. "That's a fact, Mr. Howard. I'm not joking."

"Call me love," I said, "practically nobody does."

"He's got a sense of humour, that's lovely. A husband without a sense of humour must be perfectly bloody. Well, come and see your room."

Our room was on the second floor facing the front. With a little imagination and a pair of strong binoculars we could have seen the sea.

"Sorry about the twin beds and you just married, too," said Betty, "but it's the best I can do. I just hope I won't have to throw you out on Saturday. The town's packed for the big golf."

"No cancellations yet?" asked Lenore.

"*Pas encore*. Pardon my French, it's the influence of the Rohans, although they all speak lovely English. Tea in the lounge when you're ready, love. I'll leave you to it."

When she had gone, I gazed at the twin beds and Lenore slipped an arm into mine. "Sorry, darling, but we were lucky to get in at all."

"Yes."

"We can put them close together at night."

"Yes."

We unpacked quickly and went down to tea. Next door to the lounge was a door marked 'Music Room' and from inside came the melancholy notes of Chopin's 'Funeral March', picked out on a piano with one finger. I paused, impervious to Lenore's quick tug at my arm. "Tea," she reminded. "The next door, darling, not this one."

"Yes," I said. I opened the music-room door and stepped inside.

Lenore sighed, hesitated, then followed me in. "The Pied Piper of Hamelin would have had an easy job with you," she murmured in my ear.

It was a spacious room with high ceiling and tall, latticed windows. The carpet and curtains were blue and cream, there were a great many cream leather chairs, some with arms and at the far end a woman was sitting at a cream grand piano.

She was a blonde, natural I thought although, later, Lenore was to deny this; not so young as she contrived to look, but young enough. Her complexion was, quite literally, flawless, her light grey eyes were as candid as a child's, but there were faint shadows under them and the corners of her ripe, red mouth were disconsolately turned down. She was chic as only a Frenchwoman of means can look, her pastel blue frock blending charmingly with the room.

She looked up as we entered, one finger poised tentatively above the keyboard. A gold wedding-ring glittered in the sunlight from the window. "Do I disturb—no?" she asked, and there was no mistaking the accent.

I took a chance on it. "By no means, Madame Rohan," I said, and walked straight up to the piano.

The smile that lit her eyes was wholly mischievous. "Ah, you are showing off—no?" she teased. "You say to yourself, this lady wears a wedding-ring, she speaks with a French accent, the Rohans are staying at this hotel, so she is Madame Rohan. I will address her so and astound her with my cleverness for am I not the great detective, Monsieur Anthony Howard?"

It was my turn to smile. "Well taken," I commended.

*"Comment?"*

"You have given me a Roland for an Oliver."

She gave a delightful, chuckling little laugh. Beauty no longer neglected no longer languished. "It was too easy, Monsieur Howard, Betty Beamish has told us all about you."

Damn Betty Beamish, I thought. It had not occurred to me that she would talk. I should have told Lenore to warn her not to. I had slipped up there. "I wouldn't have intruded," I said, "but I was intrigued by your choice of music."

"Macabre, no? It was the expression of my mood for everyone is at the golf and I am left desolate."

"And you like company? But I'm sure you do. No lovely woman likes to be alone."

Behind me a door closed, softly but decidedly. I looked around and saw that Lenore had left us. Madame Rohan appeared not to notice. "You think me lovely?" Her eyes mocked me.

"Yes," I said. "You were made for the gay life, the Riviera, Paris, cocktail parties. Don't you love Paris? I do."

She nodded slowly and thoughtfully. "All Frenchwomen love Paris."

"When were you last there?"

"I have just come from Paris."

"By a strange coincidence so have I. Did you have fun there? Theatres, opera, cocktail parties?"

"To speak truly, we were very quiet. One small party only at the house of Maurice, my husband's brother."

"On Sunday evening?"

"Yes. But how——?"

"Within walking distance of the Quai du Louvre?"

"This is magic." Again there was mockery in her eyes.

"Not really," I said. "I met someone who was there. An English girl, very dark, very chic, with hair coiled like this." I put my hands up to my head to demonstrate.

"That must have been Clare. Clare Thorne. She is the latest conquest of my brother-in-law, Charles." Her voice sounded faintly contemptuous, but whether of Charles or of Clare I had no means of knowing.

"I thought her a charming girl," I commented, watching Madame Rohan's face, "and a very capable one; capable of looking after herself, I mean."

"But yes, she is armed at all points except one. Charles is her Achilles heel."

"Are they engaged?"

"Not yet. She is coming here tonight, by the way, to watch Charles win this tiresome golf championship." She paused. "Is your interest in her casual or—professional?"

"Casual."

"And your interest in the Rohan family?"

"The same."

"I thought perhaps you might have some purpose in these questions." The grey eyes were suddenly shrewd. This was no cocktail-party butterfly but a clever, accomplished woman. I wondered if she, too, had an Achilles heel.

"In my profession one gets into the habit of asking questions," I said.

"Suppose you play for me instead. Betty Beamish has promised us a treat when you sit down at the piano."

She rose, gestured imperiously towards the piano stool and took a seat by the window. I bowed, matching her in silent mockery, sat down, ran my fingers along the keyboard and went very softly, very delicately into Debussy's 'Clair de Lune'.

You don't just play 'Clair de Lune', you distil it. You pick out each lovely note and try to give it the eerie, haunting, elfin sweet quality that the composer intended. I gave it everything I had and when the last note drifted away, tears were making slow, unheeded runnels in Madame Rohan's expensively produced complexion. "Now I remember you," she said softly. "Yes, now I remember."

"You've seen me before, then? Where?"

"During the war, a few nights before D Day, in a café in the French Alps. I had been entrusted with a message for one of the Resistance leaders and they took me to this little café. It was full of men of the Maquis, in darkness because of the bombing, and everyone was in low spirits because they expected an attack. There was a piano in the corner, but no one had the heart to play it and then the door was pushed open and a man was standing in the entrance with the moonlight behind him. It was you."

She paused, gazing at my face. I was acutely aware of her low, seductive voice, charged strongly with emotion. "Go on," I encouraged.

"You stood looking at the cigarettes glowing in the dark and then, as if you sensed the depression, you walked straight to the piano and began to play 'Clair de Lune'. I had never heard anything so wonderful—until now. It seemed as if the moonlight itself poured out the music as it rippled over the keys. When you had finished many of the cigarettes had gone out and there was not a sound in the room.

"You rose from the piano and walked straight out, as silently and as suddenly as you had entered and, for a full minute after you had gone, there was still no sound. Then everyone began talking at once and there was a new note in their voices, a note of confidence, of hope. Someone began to

sing the 'Marseillaise' and, one by one, other voices took it up until we were all singing. I had never dreamed of such a transformation."

"I remember that night," I said, speaking really to myself. "War makes strange situations."

"But Betty Beamish said you were in the Navy, that you were wounded and lost your ship. How, then, did you find yourself in that little café?"

"I was doing a job for Naval Intelligence," I explained. "We'd had a man covering the French channel ports, keeping us up to date on the whereabouts of German E boats and then, after a time, when we sent motor gun-boats in after the E boats they didn't come back."

"The E boats were waiting?"

"Yes, they'd got our man and put in one of their own to mislead us. It was he I was after."

"And you found him?"

I nodded. "He was one of your own countrymen. A traitor."

She jumped to her feet and I saw that her hands had clenched. "The traitors!" she exclaimed. "*'Cré nom*, the traitors! The world is full of them. They are everywhere, even yet. In great things as in small." She subsided into her seat and slowly the anger faded from her face. "There's something personal here," I thought, "something that strikes home."

"You brought him to trial and had him shot, I hope?"

"There was no trial," I said quietly. God, the things you can forget! For a moment I was back in that fear-haunted café in the mountains, seeing Pierre Lebrun with the moonlight in his eyes, staring at me in terror, realizing that I knew. And later, waiting for him outside in the cold with the gun butt almost freezing to my fingers . . .

The things you can forget. Was there anyone else who still remembered Pierre Lebrun? "Perhaps his wife remembers him," I thought, "as I remember Eve. Perhaps she has found solace with another as I have done with Lenore. Who knows?"

I saw that Madame Rohan was watching me and for a moment I could smell fear in the room. "You are a dangerous man, Monsieur Howard," she said, speaking very softly, "and it is not golf that has brought you here. I hope it is not the Rohans."

"I'm on holiday," I answered. "Part of my honeymoon, really."

"Then perhaps you should join Madame. Why did she leave you alone with me?"

"Because I am to be trusted."

"That is an invitation?"

"It is whatever you wish to make it."

"I will say one thing to you. Charles is a dangerous man, too. Do not anger Charles."

"I hope I have not angered you."

"No, no, but you should go now. Why do you not go?"

"Perhaps you have hypnotized me, Madame."

She stood up. "So! It is that."

"Now I have angered you."

"You have—impressed me. Go."

I went, to find Betty Beamish standing in the hall. "Betty," I said quietly.

She came across to me. "Yes, love?"

"Don't talk about me any more."

"Talk about you, love? I only said——"

I touched her arm lightly. "I know, I know, but, please, not any more."

She looked momentarily scared then she nodded. "I'll not say anything." Behind me, in the music-room, Madame Rohan started Chopin's 'Funeral March' again, still with one finger, but with a difference. She was stabbing at the notes viciously, with the loud pedal down, then all at once she struck one note several times with great violence and stopped.

I found Lenore in a corner of the lounge with tea set in front of her. "Hurry up, Abelard," she called, "or your tea will be stewed."

"Abelard? Oh, I see. Her name is Heloise?"

She nodded brightly. "Me detective, too."

"What else did you find in the visitor's book?"

"Maurice, Gilles and Charles, but not *l'Inconnue*."

"Her name is Clare Thorne," I said, "and she'll be here tonight."

"How do you do it? You walk right in, look them in the eyes, play them a little tune and, bingo, there they are at your feet, and the annoying thing about it is you couldn't care less. What else did you get out of her?"

I repeated the substance of the conversation and the conclusions I had drawn from it. "What makes you think there might be something in this traitor angle?" asked Lenore.

"I don't know, but that ''*Cré nom*' was a *cri du cœur*."

"Don't pun, darling. Even in French it's still the lowest form of humour."

"Sorry."

After tea I sat down at the telephone in our bedroom and called West. "I'm at the Marathon Hotel, Fairlake," I told him, "and I need some more information. Find out what the Rohans did in the war, with particular reference to any possibility of collaboration with the Germans. Then I want all you can get on the guests who attended a cocktail party on Sunday evening at the Paris house of Dr. Maurice Rohan and particularly an English girl called Clare Thorne. Can do?"

"Can try, sir." West's voice was resigned.

"Give it all you've got," I said. "Top priority."

. . . . .

Fairlake Golf Club was within a walk of the sea although never within sight of it. It presented to the eye a noble expanse of green, rolling turf, bristling with bunkers, salted with sand dunes, its bottle-necked fairways contained by stretches of terrifying rough. It was a tiger's course, a test of skill and endurance for the free-striding, long-hitting, latter-day giants of the game. Although the sea was not visible one was always aware of its nearness, of the sound and the smell of it, of the spring that only the sea could give to the gently undulating ground.

On knolls and vantage points little knots of spectators had gathered in the hope of seeing some of the great ones at practice. Next week when the Championship was on they would have to pay sweetly for the privilege, but today the links were free to all and they could roam unchecked after their favourites.

We joined a group on a substantial hillock which commanded a view of several tees and greens. In the far distance, a slowly moving army on the skyline attracted my attention and, turning to a man next me, I said, "Who's out there?"

The man turned and looked me over. He had a small,

pursed-up mouth, closed tight round a large calabash pipe. He pulled out the pipe like one unstoppering a bottle. "Locke," he said, and rammed the pipe back again.

A jet 'plane made angry noises in the intense blue sky, and my friend again pulled out the stopper. "Henry won't like that," he proclaimed.

I looked at him with eyebrows raised and he said impatiently, "Cotton's playing."

I felt my pulses stir. Henry Cotton was one of my heroes, but I had never seen him play. The thought that I might see him now, at last, was exhilarating, then I remembered. I had not come here to see Henry Cotton. "And Rohan?" I asked.

Again the business with the pipe. "He's out, too. Due in soon."

We waited. Four men putted out on a nearby green and crossed over to the next tee. A few spectators moved down to watch them drive off and among them I saw, with a start of surprise, a face I knew. "Four of the Scots brigade," announced my knowledgeable neighbour, but I scarcely heard him. I was gazing at that lowering countenance, that outthrust head, those high, straight shoulders. "Look," I said to Lenore.

"Good heavens!" she exclaimed. "Detective-Inspector McKellar!"

"I never knew he was human," I said. "Let's go and bait him."

I had clashed with McKellar two or three times since the Angel of Light case and each time my respect and liking for him had grown. He had a rocklike integrity, powers of divination that amounted almost to clairvoyance and a devotion to his job that was an inspiration to his juniors. He hated amateur competition, but was prepared to tolerate me so long as I did not rob him of his kill.

He had never been known to fail until the recent Southampton dock case and I knew he must be labouring under a sense of frustration that would make him fit company for neither man nor beast. It was unthinkable that he should be relaxing, and on a golf course, too, for I had never surprised in him any human weakness.

The Southampton dock case had been a *cause célèbre*.

After several unexplained fires on ships undergoing repair, sabotage had been suspected and Scotland Yard called in. McKellar had investigated with his usual grim thoroughness, and in the end two well-known Communist agitators had been arrested, tried and found not guilty through some defect in the evidence. I knew how McKellar must be feeling.

I closed up behind him, waited till the four men had driven off and said in his ear, "Hallo, Mac, booked any good Reds lately?" It is one of my ambitions to make McKellar smile, but this was not to be the day.

He turned slowly, looked me up and down with obvious disgust and said in his deep Scots voice, "Aye, so this is where ye are."

"I didn't know you were interested in golf, Mac."

"Mebbe I should have told ye."

"But perhaps you're here on business."

"Not your business, anyway. How do ye do, ma'am." This last to Lenore.

"Don't act so snooty, Mac," I said. "So far as I know, we're not in competition this time."

"Then my prayers have at last been answered."

"After all, Mac, you're only interested in catching a criminal after a crime's been committed, but I'm more concerned with preventing crime."

"And what crime are ye preventing on Fairlake Golf Course?"

"Oh, I'm just like you, Mac. Just watching the golf, but if you should hear of a beautiful unknown woman found drowned on Fairlake beach, just send for me. I might be able to throw some light on it."

He grunted and moved off after his four fellow countrymen. I chuckled. "Poor old Mac," I said, "he's properly in the dumps."

"You shouldn't have said that to him," chided Lenore. "It might come home to roost."

There was a stirring among the crowd on the hillock and we took our places again among them. My friend with the pipe nudged my arm and pointed to the last tee. "Rohan," he said. "Ever seen him play?"

"No," I admitted.

"Hell of a fine player. Not tall, you know, but good

shoulders on him and a long reach. There he goes now." Down wind I heard the crack of a clubhead meeting a ball.

"Who are the other three?" I asked.

"Riedler, one of the Yanks, Morgan, the Australian and Van Korn, the Dutchman."

"Quite an international match."

"Bet they've a heavy stake on it. He's hardboiled, Charles Rohan; got the right attitude if he wants to be in the big money. If he was in the fight game he'd be a killer."

I watched the four men and their caddies striding down the last fairway accompanied by a breathless crowd, several hundred strong. "That's Rohan on the left," said my informant and we moved down to mingle with the crowd. I wriggled to the front and took a good long look at Charles Rohan.

His lean, hawklike face was evenly and deeply tanned, his eyes were brown, his mouth grim. He was wearing a Basque beret, a white cotton sweater with sleeves, black linen trousers and white buckskin shoes. Behind him trailed Absalom, his Algerian caddie, bent under a capacious black and white leather bag that glittered with ironmongery. Absalom's dark, pock-marked face glistened with sweat under a scarlet fez worn at a provocative angle.

The four players hit faultless second shots and converged on the last green. Van Korn, the Dutchman, appeared to be Rohan's partner and his ball lay farthest from the hole. He putted, missed and picked up with a shrug. Riedler putted and missed, then Morgan, who had no better luck. Rohan's ball lay about five yards from the hole and, as he stepped up to it, Van Korn said anxiously, in fair English, "A half is no good."

Rohan returned no answer, but squatted down and made a prolonged examination of the line. Then he stood up, walked to the hole, looked in, went behind the hole and gazed back towards the ball. There was an impatient murmur from the crowd and, as Rohan at last took up his stance, Morgan, the cocky little Australian, called out, "Hypnotize it, Charlie boy."

A dark flush suffused Rohan's features, he gave Morgan a long and deadly look then squatted down and began the whole performance over again. At last he drew back his club, stroked the ball with a slow, deceptively easy motion and

walked forward with confidence to pick it out of the hole. The crowd gave him a round of applause which he ignored and, jerking his head for his caddie to follow, walked off the green.

Riedler watched him go. "I love that guy," he said softly. "I love him like he was my own brother." He paused. "Remind me to tell you how I shot my brother."

Something made me look round and I realized that I was not the only one who had been watching Rohan with more than casual interest. When McKellar saw me trying to catch his eye the well-known bleak look came over his face and he turned pointedly away.

. . . . . .

At six o'clock that evening, Lenore joined me in the cocktail bar. She had an evening paper in her hand and a stricken look on her face. "Anthony, have you your sedatives with you?"

"I left them at home."

"But the doctor said you must never be without them."

"I don't need them any more."

"You need one now. Look." She handed me the paper. "Another liner fire at Southampton," I read.

"Not there; lower down, in the corner."

I looked where she indicated and then it hit me. "Unknown woman found drowned on Fairlake beach." I felt the colour drain out of my face and, all at once, my hands began to shake.

"I told you you shouldn't have said that to the inspector." Lenore's eyes widened suddenly and she stared over my shoulder. I swung round to see what had upset her and found myself looking straight into the cold eyes of Detective-Inspector McKellar.

He didn't speak a word. He just jerked his head and I followed him, like a man in a dream, out to the waiting police car.

## CHAPTER FIVE

# A ROHAN AT WAR

THE mortuary was small, discreetly situated, conscientiously clean. The walls were white-tiled, the attendants white-coated, the body white-shrouded. An attendant pulled back the shroud and I looked for a long time at the face.

For a moment, too long a moment, it was the face of Eve, then the mists cleared and it was the face of a stranger. It was a young face, a very lovely face, pale and serene in death. They had tidied her up a bit and it was almost as if she had fallen asleep. She could not have been long in the water.

I was aware of water dripping somewhere, slowly, monotonously, horribly; of intense cold and of the ghastly sweet, antiseptic, mortuary smell. What a place to end in! A lump rose in my throat and into my mind came the lines that always come to me when I think of Eve, the most poignant lines in English literature, "Cover her face: mine eyes dazzle: she died young." I did not know I had spoken the words aloud until I heard my voice, low, flat, devoid of emotion, echoing in the quiet room.

I looked up, only to flinch from the fierce intensity of McKellar's gaze. He must have been watching me like that all the time I had been staring at the body. The silence stretched to breaking point, then he made a gesture of impatience. "Well?" he demanded.

I looked at him, tried to speak and couldn't. It was as if some deadly paralysis had seized upon my throat muscles.

"Is she the one?"

I shook my head.

"Ever see her before?"

Again I shook my head.

"Lost your tongue?" His eyes were no less vicious than his voice.

I made an effort. "She's a complete stranger, Mac."

"But ye were expecting this to happen?"

"To a different girl."

"What girl?"

"No one you know. It's a long story and meantime I'm not disposed to tell it." I glanced at the police surgeon, brisk and impersonal in the background. "How did she die, Doctor?"

"Drowning."

"Just drowning?"

"What more would you like?"

"Could she have been hypnotized shortly before death?"

"There's no means of telling."

I bent over her and gently raised one eyelid then the other. "The pupils of her eyes are dilated, which I understand happens in hypnotic trance."

"It happens in death, trance or no trance."

"Is that so, now? In my profession we're always learning."

The mortuary attendant looked at her soulfully. "She's just a kid," he murmured.

"Old enough to have known heartbreak," I commented.

"She wasn't *virgo intacta*, if that's what you mean," revealed the police surgeon.

I gave him a look of hate. "Don't dirty it up," I said. "Were there any marks of violence?"

"None that had anything to do with this."

"How long has she been dead?"

"Not long before midnight and not after 2 a.m. That's as near as I can go."

"How did she do it?"

"The inference is she went off the pier."

"Alone or with assistance?"

"Nobody saw it happen. They close the pier at half past ten and all the staff are away by eleven. She wasn't there then. She must have climbed over the turnstiles, walked out to the end of the pier and—splash."

"You're determined to make it suicide, then?"

"I'm not determined to make it anything. I'll give you a forecast of the jury's verdict, if you like. Deceased met her death by drowning and there is insufficient evidence to show how she came to be in the water."

"Any laundry marks?"

"Her clothes were all new."

"What about her handbag?"

"None found."

In the background McKellar snorted. Apparently he had

decided I had had enough rope. "The police'll ask all the questions that are needed," he growled, "and it is your duty to help the police by telling everything ye know."

"I'm always willing to help the police, Mac, so I'll tell you what to do next. Get Charles Rohan down here, ask him to try and identify the body and watch his face while he does so—the same way you watched me. His reaction might interest you."

I saw McKellar's eyes blaze with sudden excitement. The name of Charles Rohan meant something to him, had some special significance. "Ye'll have to tell me more than that," he insisted.

"I don't know any more than that. It's all conjecture, no evidence and I know you don't believe anything but evidence. Am I free to go?"

He nodded. "Meantime. The police car will run ye back."

"No it won't. I'd rather walk."

"It won't be any trouble."

Something broke inside me. "Why can't you let me alone?" I snarled. "I don't want people hanging round me, least of all policemen." I shouldered the police surgeon aside, walked quickly to the door and out. No one called after me. No one tried to stop me.

The sunlight hit me like a hammer and for a moment I stood gazing blindly at the bustling street. Then a bar across the way came into focus and I steered a straight course for it, climbed on a stool at the counter and called for a double whisky.

The barman poured it, set it in front of me and said in a bright, conversational tone, "Like some water with it, sir?"

I looked at him. "Why?"

The barman looked back at me, shrugged his shoulders and walked off to the other end of the bar. I disposed of the whisky in a couple of gulps and felt the welcome fires spring up inside me. I was about to order another when, deep in my mind, I heard Philip Carter's voice, "If that should happen, I want you to promise me one thing, that you'll go straight to Lenore."

I slid off the stool and headed for the door. "Good night," I called to the barman. He looked at me sourly and didn't answer. Perhaps it served me right.

Outside the mortuary a black Rolls had just drawn up. It was my Rolls, Lenore at the wheel. She must have been in considerable stress of mind because she hates driving the Rolls in traffic. I ran across to her and saw her face light up. "I'm all right, darling," I reassured her. "Were you scared I'd blow my top?"

"A little. If you'd waited, I'd have come with you. After a while I couldn't stand it any longer, so I asked where the mortuary was and came after you."

She looked at me shrewdly. "How many have you had?"

"Just one."

"Then you can drive." She made room for me at the wheel and as I put the car in motion, she said, with a tremor in her voice, "Was it—*l'Inconnue*?"

I shook my head. "A perfect stranger. A very lovely girl, but a stranger."

"Coincidence?"

"We'll see." As an author, I know that coincidences happen; as a detective I distrust them. I had nothing to go on except instinct, but I did not believe it was coincidence.

At the hotel Madame Rohan awaited us in a state of some agitation. She barred our way to the stairs and proclaimed, in the tragic overtones of an aristocrat announcing the fall of the Bastille, that the police had taken Charles.

"Oh, come," I said, "I don't think it's as bad as that."

"I tell you they have taken him and it is you we have to thank for it. You only. First you go off with the police in their auto, then, soon afterwards, the same auto and the same policemen come back and remove Charles."

"They didn't remove him. They merely asked him to accompany them."

"For what purpose?"

"They thought he might be able to identify someone who is dead."

"Someone who is —dead?" She gave back a step and there was genuine surprise in her voice. "I said to Charles, 'It is that devil of a piano-playing detective who has done this to you,' but—I do not understand."

"You thought they wanted him for a different purpose?"

"I could not think why they wanted him at all. What have we done to you? Why have you come here to plague us?"

"I came here to watch the Open Golf Championship."

"You came here to do mischief. Who is this dead person?"

"Perhaps Charles can tell us."

"Charles knows no one here, but no one." She stamped her foot and I said very quietly:

"Except, perhaps, this unfortunate, murdered girl."

"A girl! Murdered! Not Clare?" The words were a cry of distress, of fear.

"You think it possible he might have murdered Clare?"

"I do not think it possible that Charles could murder anyone. Was—was it Clare?"

"No."

"There's a devil in you," she said, "a devil that must have something to destroy. It may destroy you. Charles does not know any girl in England except Clare."

"Then don't worry about him," I said, "he should be back soon."

"You assure me of that?"

I nodded. "In this country the innocent have nothing to fear, Madame Rohan."

She was calmer now. "Perhaps I make too much of it, but since you came there has been a change in the atmosphere of this place. I can feel it here." She placed a hand on her deliciously curved bosom. "There is a nameless terror."

"Nonsense," I scoffed. "You dramatize yourself too much."

Two men came towards us from the direction of the stairs, and Madame Rohan said, "Here is my husband and his brother, we will say nothing of this to them." The next moment I was shaking hands in turn with Dr. Gilles Rohan of Rouen and Dr. Maurice Rohan of Paris.

Both of them bore a striking resemblance to Charles, but Gilles had a small black moustache and was slightly shorter than Charles. They spoke almost perfect English and when I commented on this they revealed that, as children, they had had an English governess and that they came every year to England on holiday.

"I am almost as much at home in London as in Paris," said Maurice. He looked a year or two older than Gilles, perhaps thirty-five or -six and seemed the stronger personality. He smiled readily (whereas Gilles had a solemn cast of countenance) and his eyes missed nothing. They were most expressive

eyes, dark and dangerous, and I could well believe that this man was a master hypnotist.

The trousers of Gilles' nondescript grey flannel suit bagged at the knees, but Maurice was faultlessly turned out in a pale green gaberdine suit and a cream nylon shirt. The suit had been cut by a tailor of quality and was worn with an air of distinction.

"Where's Charles?" asked Gilles, in a petulant, disapproving tone. "Not practising again?"

"No," said his wife, "I do not think he is practising." She darted a reproachful look at me, and I said:

"I think he will be here soon."

I felt Maurice's eyes on my face. "You have met, then?"

"Not exactly," I said, "but I had the pleasure of watching him play the last hole this afternoon. It was most impressive."

Maurice produced a slim gold cigarette-case, offered it with a neat little bow to Lenore, then to me. "You will join us for a drink? We would like that very much."

We adjourned to the cocktail bar and seated ourselves round a table in the window. There were not many people in the bar, but such as were there seemed to find our table of considerable interest. Madame Rohan's voluptuous good looks, her unaffected gestures, her little trills of laughter and her high-pitched voice with its unmistakable French accent attracted the attention of the men and the handsome, intelligent face of Maurice Rohan seemed to fascinate the women. Gilles, with his dark, smouldering eyes and shoulder-shrugging mannerisms, came in for his share of attention and Lenore and I were not neglected either.

The talk was largely of golf, but my responses were mechanical for I had much on my mind. There was going to be one hell of a row when Charles got back, and I could not think how best to handle it. I should not have blurted out that stuff to McKellar about getting Charles Rohan to identify the body but anger and sorrow for the dead girl had temporarily robbed me of discretion. My unruly tongue and Betty Beamish's gossipy one had landed me in what was likely to be a very unpleasant spot.

Madame Rohan kept glancing at her diamond wrist-watch, looking at the door and frowning at me, but I affected not to

notice this pantomime. Then the door opened and Charles came in. He stood for a moment in the doorway, looking round the room, a dark scowl on his handsome features, then Madame Rohan jumped up from her seat and ran to him with a cry of welcome.

Gilles Rohan smiled a thin-lipped smile at me. "Heloise is so volatile," he commented.

"So French," said Maurice, watching her coldly over the rim of his Martini glass.

Heloise spoke to Charles in low, rapid French, he gave a frowning look at me and followed her to the table. "Charles," she said, "you must meet Monsieur Anthony Howard who writes detective stories and himself detects crimes."

"I must indeed," said Charles, quietly but with menace.

"Madame Howard, my brother-in-law, Charles." Lenore gave a gracious inclination of her head and Charles appraised her in a quick, all-embracing look. He seemed to like what he saw.

"Just think, they have been honeymooning in our wonderful Paris," gushed Heloise.

"Paris?" Charles' head jerked up and a wary glint came into his eyes. "I envy them. But this table is too crowded. Perhaps you will drink with me at the bar, monsieur, and we will become better acquainted." It was more of a command than an invitation, but I said politely that I would be delighted.

As I rose, Lenore's hand touched mine in warm sympathy and I gave her a smile that I tried to make reassuring. The bar was semi-circular with a number of red leather stools, and Charles led the way to the far end where there was no one within earshot. We climbed on adjacent stools and Charles, producing his cigarette-case, offered me a cigarette, which I accepted. The case was of silver—perhaps he'd have a gold one after the championship—and inside I saw an inscription in French and the name 'Clare'.

"A golf trophy?" I enquired.

"No. A gift from a friend."

"May I read the inscription?"

He hesitated, then shrugged his broad, strongly developed shoulders. "Certainly."

The inscription read, "*'Tirez le rideau, la farce est jouée.'* Clare."

"I will translate for you," said Rohan. "'Ring down the curtain, the farce is over.' They are words supposed to have been spoken by François Rabelais on his death-bed."

"And in this case I suppose they refer to the death-bed of love?"

"Their meaning is for me alone." He snapped the case shut, accepted a light from my lighter and, as the barman placed dry Martinis in front of us, said in a quiet, unaccented voice, "You are interested in golf, monsieur?"

"Very much."

"Financially?"

"How do you mean, financially?"

"You bet?"

"On horses occasionally, on golfers never."

"So. It is not that, then. I thought perhaps you might have bet heavily on another player and hoped to injure my chances of winning this Championship."

"Why should you think that?"

"Because I understand I am indebted to you for a very uncomfortable experience." I remained silent, and he added grimly, "At the morgue."

"An unpleasant place," I said. "You have my sympathy."

He flushed. "I am trying to discuss this matter with you in a civilized fashion, Monsieur Howard. Please do not make it difficult for me. I have managed to subdue my anger, but if I had met you as I left the morgue, I would almost certainly have assaulted you."

"That would have been a pity," I said.

He flexed his large, sinewy hands. They were capable hands, strong and deeply tanned. He kept his nails well. "It is not concern for you that stops me, but concern for my hands. In my profession it is important that my hands should not suffer."

"Believe me, Rohan," I said, "if you should try to assault me, it is not only your hands that will suffer."

He smiled at that, a tight-lipped, wholly mirthless smile, and his hands clenched. "Perhaps you have some explanation."

"Of what?"

"Of why you suggested to the police that I could identify that girl."

"Couldn't you?"

"I could not." He snapped the words with sudden viciousness and the look he gave me was murderous.

"Did the police tell you it was I who put them up to it?"

"No, the police here are very discreet. They have a phrase that covers everything, 'From information received', but I found the attendant at the morgue less reticent."

I damned the attendant under my breath. Aloud I said: "The whole thing is due to a misunderstanding. I was watching you play this afternoon when I ran into an old friend, Detective-Inspector McKellar of Scotland Yard. We have been rivals, you understand, and we began to discuss past cases. He tried to find out why I was here and to mystify him a little, purely out of mischief, I said that if he should find a body on the beach, I might be able to throw some light on it.

"Next thing I knew I was summoned to the mortuary to see if I could identify this drowned girl. Of course I could not and, in a moment of petulance, I said he might just as well have sent for Charles Rohan as for me. Your name sprang to my mind, you see, because we had both been watching you play, but unfortunately the inspector seems to have taken me literally."

I glanced sideways at Rohan's face to see how he was taking it, but his expression gave nothing away. After a moment's silence he said, "I would not have thought the inspector to be so stupid."

"He's far from stupid, but to understand properly, you would have to know something of our past rivalries. He now regards everything I say with the greatest suspicion."

"He would seem to have reason."

"Well, that's it," I said, "take it or leave it."

"It is so silly it might just be true. I hope for your sake, monsieur, that it is true and that I shall have no more visitations from the police. It is important, you understand, that I should have a tranquil mind, that I should not have to think of anything but golf until the Championship is over."

"That is understandable."

"It is my great ambition to win the Open Golf Championship for France."

I thought that his great ambition was to win the Championship for Charles Rohan, but now was not the time to say so.

"I apologize for any inconvenience you've been caused," I said.

He nodded. "I accept the apology; provided there is no more inconvenience for I will not let anything come between me and this Championship. Not anything nor any –person."

It was a declaration of war, but I chose to ignore it. "Now that everything is cleared up to our mutual satisfaction," I said, "shall we join the others?"

"If you wish it."

Shortly afterwards, a thin man with dark glasses and a slight stoop came over to our table and greeted the Rohans. It was obvious that he was English, and Maurice introduced him to us as Dr. George Palliser. He made himself very pleasant, insisted on buying us all a drink and, as he was paying the barman, Madame Rohan leaned across to me and whispered, "He is Clare's stepfather."

I regarded him thereafter with greater interest. Here was yet another suspect for Clare had said to me that we would not have met had it not been for a doctor. Could she possibly have meant her stepfather? Did he dabble in hypnotism, too? Could I have been completely mistaken in turning all my artillery on Charles Rohan? After all, Charles was not a doctor.

Madame Rohan was engaging Dr. Palliser in conversation and I listened closely. "When do you expect Clare to arrive?" she asked.

Dr. Palliser treated her to his pleasant, ever ready smile. "She said about half past eight."

"Oh, delightful. Then she will be in good time for the Ball."

"What Ball?" I asked.

"Do you mean to say no one has told you? Tonight we are to have an Eve of Championship Ball, here in the hotel, and everyone has to be in fancy dress." She paused and made a gesture of consternation, "But you will have no costume!"

"Don't worry about that," said Lenore, "nothing in the world would persuade my husband to wear a fancy dress costume."

"Oh, I don't know," I said, "I think it might be quite amusing. Perhaps the hotel can provide something that would do. Let's ask Betty Beamish."

Betty was all contrition at having forgotten to tell us about the Ball and her apology lasted several minutes. "But it's quite all right, really," she wound up. "We have some lovely costumes we can hire you for almost nothing. We keep them for guests who are unable to provide for themselves, and I've the very thing for you, Lenore. A Dresden shepherdess outfit, such a lovely shade of lavender."

She put her head sideways and looked at me. "Now, what for you, love? You'd look just right as an Elizabethan courtier with a ruff round your neck and I think I can——"

"Don't bother, Betty," I broke in. "My wants will be much simpler. Just my dinner suit, Lenore's sun-glasses, a long black overcoat, a black homburg hat, black gloves and yards and yards of white silk muffler. Can you lay your hands on the last four items?"

"Yes, I think so, love, but what is it meant to be?"

"The invisible man," I said.

"Now that's really original. Lenore was telling the truth when she said how clever you were. I'll see what I can do for you, love."

After an excellent but somewhat hurried dinner we went upstairs to put on our costumes. Lenore's shepherdess outfit was a little tight and the black overcoat Betty had procured for me was rather long, but one could not expect perfection at such short notice. The black soft hat was a size too big, but I stuffed newspaper behind the leather band until it fitted reasonably well.

I wound the muffler round my face, put on the black gloves and Lenore's dark sun-glasses and paraded round the room. "What do I look like?" I asked.

"You look like what you want to look like," said Lenore, struggling with her corsage. "The man we saw gazing down at us from the embankment at the Quai du Louvre."

"*Bien*," I said, "it marches."

"Just what are you up to, anyway?"

"If the man in black was Charles or one of the others, he'll get a shock when I appear on the stairs. He may show it and then I'll know on whom to concentrate."

"You'll need to make your appearance at a time when they're all present."

"I know, and that's where you come in."

"I'm glad I come in somewhere."

"At half past eight they'll all be down in the hall, waiting for Clare to arrive. I shall watch from this window till I see her approaching, then I'll send you downstairs. You will engage the Rohans in light conversation and when I appear on the staircase, you will draw attention to my presence so that they will all turn to look at me. You will then watch their faces and you may rest assured I'll be doing the same."

"What do we look for? A guilty start?"

"Yes." I lifted the lid of our suitcase and slid my hand into the pocket in the silk lining. It was empty. "Where did you put my gun?" I asked.

She turned round from the dressing-table, her face startled. "Your gun? I didn't touch it."

We looked at each other for a long time in silence, silence except for one insignificant sound. It was nothing really; only my heart beating a little louder, a little faster in the quiet room. "Rule number one for private detectives," I said, "when not in use keep your artillery locked up."

"I forgot it was there," said Lenore in an anguished voice.

"Don't let it worry you," I comforted, "so did I."

With one accord we began to search the room, but we might as well have spared ourselves the trouble. The gun had been taken. Lenore sat down on the bed, as if all the life had been suddenly drained out of her. Her mouth was pinched and white, in startling contrast to the smooth pink of her cheeks, and for a moment I saw little lines I had never noticed before.

"The door was locked," she said, her voice no stronger than a whisper.

"And the key left hanging on a hook behind the porter's desk," I reminded her. "Accessible to anyone interested."

"Anthony, we must leave here at once."

"You know I can't do that."

"Surely your life is more important than——"

"My life is important to me and I hope to you, but it may not be so important to God."

"What are you trying to say?"

"That our actions are dictated by the Almighty whose puppets we all are."

"I didn't know you were religious."

"I don't usually let it show."

"Better a live mouse than a dead——"

"Stop it." There was a hysterical ring in her voice and I gripped her bare shoulders hard. "Lenore, you mustn't get this way. I'm in no danger. Nobody's going to take pot shots at me in hotel corridors. Whoever took that gun took it in self defence, first to stop me using it on him and second to use it on me only as a last resort if I should get too close. I'm not nearly close enough yet."

Lenore took hold of herself and was calm again. She even managed a smile. "I'm sorry, darling. A detective's wife has a difficult role and I'm not used to it yet."

"I know," I said, "but don't worry about the gun. He won't use it till he's suspected of murder, anyway."

"Why do you say he? Madame Rohan took the gun."

"Woman's intuition is a wonderful thing. You're probably right. But did she take it for herself or to hand to someone else? She seems to expect trouble for Charles."

"Perhaps you could get it back. You could search her room."

"I meant to do that, anyway. I intend to search all their rooms. In a way I'm glad the gun's been taken, for it bolsters up my belief that something devilish is going on."

"Don't forget someone tried to kill you in Paris."

"Yes, but in a way that would not suggest murder, which makes me doubly sure he or she won't try to use the gun. There's nothing subtle about a bullet."

Lenore sighed. "I hope you're right." I looked at her with compassion, knowing that she loved me and was suffering for it. I know, none better, that love is not the sugary nonsense of the novelists. It is compounded of many elements and not the least of them is terror.

I crossed to the window. "*L'Inconnue* should be here soon." I lit a cigarette and waited. When the cigarette was almost finished, a little cream-coloured *Volkswagen* turned in through the gates and pulled up at the front entrance to the hotel. It had a GB plate on the back and, as I leaned forward to get a better view, a girl climbed out of it and began to struggle with a suitcase and a hat box which seemed to be jammed behind the back seat.

She was wearing a black stockinette cap, black suit, black woollen sweater, black lizard shoes and bag and as she

stepped back with her luggage, I saw the pale oval face for which I had searched so despairingly and so long.

"She's here," I announced, excitement putting a tremor into my voice. "Off you go, darling, and be ready to do your stuff."

Lenore kissed me and went off without a word. She was a vision of delight in her lavender silk and I felt my eyes grow dim as I watched her go. Then I turned again to the window.

Clare Thorne was talking to the porter, her head thrown back, her lovely face animated, poise in every line of her beautifully moulded figure. I thought of Macbeth's gruff, 'Duncan comes here tonight', and Lady Macbeth's grim rejoinder, 'And when goes hence?' Then I left the room and made for the stairs.

Before I reached the top of the staircase I could hear the hum of voices. The guests were assembling for the Ball and, looking down, I beheld the motliest collection of costumes I had ever seen. Some guests had come prepared, but most of the costumes had been improvised and looked it. The children had been allowed to stay up late and they were running about everywhere, wearing ridiculous paper hats and squealing with excitement. A Scotsman wearing a kilt was loudly proclaiming that he was not in fancy dress, but his protest was drowned in a gust of laughter.

I adjusted the dark glasses, tightened the muffler, pulled down the hat brim and began to descend. At the bend of the staircase, which commanded a perfect view of the hall and the entrance doors, I paused, waiting. The Rohans and Dr. Palliser were standing together just to the left of the entrance. Lenore was talking to them and they had an air of expectancy.

Charles was wearing his golfing outfit, black linen trousers and white sweater, but a red scarf knotted round his neck, and a white cap worn at an angle, cunningly and simply suggested an Apache from the stews of Montmartre. He had just the face for it, thin and passionate and ruthless. Heloise, suggestively draped in red, white and blue with a scarlet sash, was patriotic as La Belle France and Gilles wore tan corduroy shorts, a green jacket and a Tyrolean hat. Maurice and Dr. Palliser were dull and conventional in double-breasted dinner suits and large cigars.

"Any minute now," I thought. "Will you walk into my parlour?" The door swung open and Clare Thorne swept in, her head still thrown back, her eyes bright with an anticipatory sparkle. She paused, looked round, saw the Rohans and almost ran towards them. They crowded round her, talking and laughing, but she had eyes only for Charles. She kissed him and his arms went round her, then, with reluctance, they parted. I waited till the first excitement of the welcome had worn off then, as Lenore glanced up for her cue, I raised my hand.

"Goodness," I heard her say, "what's this coming down the stairs?" But at the same moment Clare caught sight of me over Charles' shoulder. Her eyes flooded with terror that was a shock to see and Charles was just in time to catch her as she fell.

## CHAPTER SIX

# MARKS OF VIOLENCE

I RAN down the stairs two at a time, all thought of studying the expressions on the Rohans' faces forgotten. Charles had laid Clare down on a convenient settee and they were all standing round her looking confused and anxious. Then Maurice shouldered Charles aside and bent over her. "She has only fainted," he announced in French.

"Only!" exclaimed Charles. "Why should she faint?"

Betty Beamish hurried over with a glass of water and at the same moment Clare opened her eyes and struggled to sit up. I had insinuated myself between Maurice and Charles and had removed the scarf and the dark glasses so that mine was the first face she saw. Her returning colour fled once more. "You!" she gasped in a barely audible voice and all at once she began to shake uncontrollably.

Charles turned his head and gave me a long, calculating look. "You and Miss Thorne have met before, then?" he asked.

"Oh yes," I confirmed, "we're old friends. Are you all right, Clare?"

She rallied quickly and the eyes that met mine were now quite steady. "Perfectly. I don't know what came over me. I just blacked out."

She was wearing her luck piece on the lapel of her suit and I saw that the golf club was again slightly bent. She leaned against the back of the settee, outwardly composed, smiling at Charles. "Don't look so shattered, Charles. Perhaps it was something I've eaten."

Charles rounded on his brothers. "One of you had better take a look at her," he snapped.

Maurice nodded. "I think so, too." He smiled at Clare. "Which of us would you like?"

She looked at them both, sizing them up with a glint of mischief in her eyes, then she gestured towards Heloise Rohan. "Sorry to disappoint you, boys. I'll take Heloise." She stood up. "See, I'm all right."

She walked steadily, almost regally to the lift, followed by

Heloise, Betty and the porter with her bags. As the lift gates clanged shut behind her, she darted a quick look at me and I saw the shadow of fear again as the lift rose up out of sight.

I joined Lenore who had kept discreetly in the background. "The best laid schemes," I said with a wry smile.

"I know, it was hard luck, darling. Why did she faint?"

"Because she saw me coming down the stairs."

"But she couldn't have recognized you, then."

"She recognized the man in black."

"Of course, that's it. You must have frightened the life out of her."

"Yes, she knows who the man in black is and she's afraid of him. Perhaps I'll get his identity out of her later."

Heloise was away for a considerable time, and Charles was showing signs of strain when at last she came down the stairs alone. "Well?" demanded Charles. "How is she?"

"I can find nothing wrong," replied Heloise. "She seems to be under some mental strain, but she would not tell me and beyond that—nothing. I have given her a sedative and she will be down soon. She's changing."

We followed the crowd into the ballroom where the judging of the costumes was in progress. Betty Beamish coaxed me to resume my muffler and black glasses, announced loudly that I was 'The Invisible Man' and made me join the slow parade of revellers round and round the judges who sat at a table in the centre of the long room. Fortunately, my ordeal was of short duration for I was speedily disqualified on the ground that part of my face was visible. Lenore was awarded second prize for her Dresden Shepherdess outfit, and the other prizes went to strangers.

The results had just been announced when Clare Thorne entered the ballroom. She was wearing a short, peacock blue cocktail frock with touches of black and the fur wrap she had cast away so disdainfully on the cobbles of the Quai du Louvre. She had renewed her make up, but there were dark smudges under her eyes and the fresh dark lipstick served only to accentuate the pallor of her cheeks.

The Rohans, Lenore and I had seized upon a corner near the band and had made it our own by putting two tables together and placing upon them belongings such as cocktail bags and packets of cigarettes. An armchair had been reserved

for Clare and Charles led her to it with every appearance of solicitude. I introduced her to Lenore and they were charming to each other until Charles took Clare away to dance.

"You were right about her eyes," said Lenore in my ear. "They're the bluest I've ever seen."

Gilles bowed merrily to his wife and led her on to the floor. Maurice cast an enterprising eye round the room, selected the prettiest unattached girl in sight and attached himself to her with true Gallic panache. Dr. Palliser leaned back in his chair and appeared to go to sleep.

Lenore and I sat the first dance out. It was a quick-step and my injured leg prefers more gentle rhythms, so we watched Charles and Clare. They danced close together, but with dignity and impeccable footwork, keeping their heads very still as all good dancers do. They spoke scarcely at all, giving themselves up entirely to the music and to each other. While waiting for the encore, however, they talked quickly and with animation, then surrendered themselves to the music again in an enraptured silence.

When the dance was over, Maurice brought his captive back to our table and introduced her as Peggy Sinclair from Nottingham. She was a blonde by inclination with a merry eye and a rich red mouth and if Maurice had any wish to go to bed with her I thought it unlikely that he'd have to hypnotize her first.

The next dance was a tango and I essayed it with Lenore. The tango is our favourite and, as a rule, I think we dance it rather well. Tonight, however, I made one or two mis-steps and Lenore had to remind me more than once of what movement came next.

"Sorry, darling," I apologized. "I'm afraid I'm not concentrating tonight."

"Where are you? With Clare or at the mortuary?"

"At the mortuary. I'm wondering what the gimmick was."

"The gimmick?"

"An American expression meaning the thing that sets off a train of events; the match that fires the powder. In other words, what strategem did the murderer employ to induce that poor girl to do away with herself? That *l'Inconnue de la Seine* touch would hardly work over here for it would take an

exceedingly skilled hypnotist to persuade anyone that Fairlake Pier was the Quai du Louvre and the Irish Sea the Seine."

"I thought you were dealing with an exceedingly skilled hypnotist."

"I know, but I think he must have used a different technique this time. The question is, what? Have you ever heard of any real life *femmes fatales* who drowned themselves around these parts?"

My wife shook her head. "Must it be someone from around these parts?"

"Not really. Anywhere in England would probably do."

"A character from literature, perhaps? There was Mary who was sent to call the cattle home across the Sands of Dee."

"I haven't noticed any cows on the sands of Fairlake. I don't think the holidaymakers would like them."

"No doubt you'll think of something. I've been thinking of something myself."

"That sounds ominous the way you say it. What?"

"Who pays for this investigation?"

"The royalties from my latest book."

"I thought that was written to pay the income tax due on the last one."

"This time there's a surplus."

"Is there, really? You're getting quite clever at it."

"There will be enough for you, too, so don't worry. I won't forget that I'm the breadwinner."

"Of course you won't, darling. But please," she tapped me lightly on the cheek, "not too many crumbs to the birds."

"So you don't like her?"

"I can't make her out. She's in love with Charles Rohan and she's mortally afraid of something or someone, but she looks well able to take care of herself."

"Perhaps the one in the mortuary thought she could take care of herself, too."

"Let's just dance."

We danced. Half-way through the encore we were aware of handclapping from the non-dancers sitting round the room.

"I didn't know we were as good as that," I said.

"Silly. It's Charles and *l'Inconnue*. Just look at them." I looked at them and marvelled for I had never seen the tango

danced with such perfect timing, such complete absorption, such sinuous grace. Couples were leaving the floor to watch and soon Lenore and I resumed our seats also.

In a few moments Charles and Clare were the only two still dancing, but they were quite unaware of it. They were gazing into each other's eyes, silent, unsmiling, the music throbbing with a power and a glory that were for them alone. Charles' Apache get-up and the short, flared skirt of Clare's peacock blue frock heightened the illusion, the illusion of smouldering passion about to burst into scorching flame. I could not tell if Charles was in love with with her, but it was plain that he desired her.

The band played up magnificently, but at last they had had enough and the dance ended amid a storm of applause that shook the room. Charles and Clare came slowly to themselves, smiled at each other, linked arms and came back to their seats. Patches of colour stained Clare's cheekbones, and her eyes were bright blue stars. Dr. Palliser, who had feigned sleep throughout, opened one eye and said in the silkiest tones: "My dears, please remember where you are. You couldn't have been more obvious if you had both been naked."

Clare bent and patted his cheek. "Now, Daddykins," she reproved, "you're just jealous."

Palliser rolled his eyes. "Daddykins!" he repeated in a disgusted tone and closed his eyes again.

The next dance was a slow foxtrot, and standing up, I bowed to Clare, took her by the right hand and pulled. She came unresistingly into my arms and I swept her away into the flood of dancers. We circled the room twice in a deadly silence, then I said, "This reminds me of a very lewd joke I once heard which ends with one character saying to another, 'All right, *I'll* wash the dishes'."

"I don't want to hear it."

"I wouldn't dream of telling it. The characters, you see, had agreed that the first to speak would wash the dishes and then they subjected each other to the most original indignities to force one of them to speak."

"Why are you here?"

"To watch the Golf Championship."

She threw back her head and gazed searchingly into my face. "How did you know I was coming to this hotel?"

"You could have knocked me down with a feather when I saw you come in."

"Why trouble to lie?"

"It's no trouble."

We danced in silence again for another circuit then she said, "I want you to do something for me."

"Name it."

"Just leave me alone."

"It isn't much to ask."

"Please remember that I can take care of myself."

"I'll put it on your tombstone. Who was the man in black?"

"What man in black?"

"The one you thought you saw coming down the stairs tonight."

"I don't know any man in black."

"Why trouble to lie?"

"I don't know any man in black. Period." Her voice rose to an almost hysterical pitch and there was another pregnant silence. Then she said more gently, "Sorry if I seem ungrateful, but I can't stand persecution."

"I don't know anyone who can."

The dance ended and while we waited for the encore she said in pleading tones, "Did you really come just to watch the golf?"

"I'll be staying here, I hope, until the Championship is—decided."

"That doesn't quite answer my question, does it?"

"You haven't answered mine."

We danced again. "I wish I'd never set eyes on you," she lamented.

"If you had never set eyes on me, you would not now be here."

That made her miss a step. She apologized and said in a chastened voice, "I never thought of it like that, but you're quite right, of course. I *am* sorry."

We finished the dance in silence, then I restored her to Charles and resumed my seat next to Lenore. "She won't talk," I intimated.

"Did you really think she would? I had that dance with Charles."

"Enjoy it?"

"He's a wonderful dancer, but he reminds me of a snake. Cold and venomous."

"Did he have much to say?"

"He said I looked enchanting."

"An understatement. Anything else?"

"He said: 'Please let us not speak. It is an insult to the music'."

"A very smooth character, Charles."

"And very sure of himself."

"Don't worry," I said grimly. "I'll bring him down. If he murdered that girl in the mortuary, I'll see that he hangs for it."

Lenore gave a little shudder. "I wouldn't like to have you after me," she said.

We sat out the next two dances then I had a waltz with Peggy Sinclair. There were no subtleties about Peggy. Everything she had was in the shop window, which made a refreshing change. She had taken up golf two years ago because her boy friend of that time was keen on it and she had just had her handicap reduced to twenty-three, which was the same as her age, so wasn't that a coincidence? She thought Charles Rohan was terrific and Maurice was awfully nice. Did I know if he was married?

"Charles or Maurice?" I asked.

She flushed becomingly. "Maurice."

"So far as I know, he has no wife," I assured her.

"I don't know about doctors, though," she said doubtfully. "They know too much about you. Especially Maurice. He's a gynae-something—that means he knows all about women."

"The man who knows all about women doesn't exist," I [illegible]

She giggled. "He hypnotizes people, too."

"Don't let him hypnotize you."

"As if I would. They eat funny things in France, don't they? Snails and frogs, I mean."

"They eat the finest food in the world," I told her, "and they know how to cook it, too."

She brightened at that and I led her back to Maurice, who brightened also.

Gilles had ordered champagne for the table and the party

began to grow merry except Heloise, on whom champagne appeared to have the reverse effect. I danced a slow foxtrot with her and found her very much on her dignity. "I have been watching you," she announced. "Why do you frighten Clare?"

"Ask her."

"She will not tell me."

"She won't tell me, either, so I don't know why I frighten her."

"Perhaps it is just that you are a natural bogey man—no?"

"Perhaps. What did you do with my gun?"

Her eyes, round and innocent, met mine bravely. "You have a gun, too?"

"Forget I asked," I said. "Are you watching golf tomorrow?"

"So now we stop fencing and just make conversation?"

"It's much less strain."

"But much more dull. Whatever you may be, Monsieur Howard, you are not dull."

"If I can bring any brightness into your sheltered life, pray command me."

"First the detective, then the socialite, and now the flirt."

"Do you find flirting disagreeable?"

Her eyes mocked me. "Monsieur, I am French."

"Yes, you are all artists in the game of love."

"Why not? The moment we begin to live we begin also to die. That troubles me. What is the body for but to give pleasure—while it can?" She paused meaningly, then dropped her voice. "Look, for example, at Madame Howard."

I glanced across the room at Lenore. She was dancing with Charles, her cheek against his cheek, her body moulded against his body, as closely as if they had been welded together. She will not dance with me like that in public and for a moment I was startled. Then I understood and smiled to myself. "I see what you mean," I said. "Fascinating chap, your brother-in-law."

"A snake also fascinates."

I danced the next dance with Lenore. "Well," I asked, "has he got it?"

"Not on him. I can swear to that."

"I'll bet you can. I saw you. You made Mata Hari look like an amateur."

"You were doing all right, yourself. Has Madame Rohan got it?"

"Not in her corsage. I could see right down the valley. I asked her point blank and she gave me a look of wide-eyed innocence."

"Which means she took it."

"Probably."

At eleven o'clock Charles rose to his feet and announced his intention to retire. He had drunk sparingly of the champagne and was in full possession of his faculties. He said something to Clare in French in a very low tone, waved a casual hand to the rest of us and departed bedward. Maurice looked after him with a rather grim smile. "With Charles this Championship is all."

"Do you think he has a chance?" I asked.

"He is confident. Whatever Charles does he has to be the best. He is not interested in coming second."

"I hope he wins for all our sakes," said Gilles, "or he will be quite impossible."

"He has plenty of willpower, anyway," commented Lenore, "to go early to bed from such a delightful party as this."

"Charles worships physical fitness," said Maurice, stretching lazily and producing his gold cigarette-case. "Our father wanted him to be a doctor, too, but he cannot endure sick people. A sick body or a sick mind, he would fly them as he would the plague."

Betty Beamish came over very beamish indeed. "Two items of news, love," she said. "We've just had a cancellation so you can stay on, and you're wanted on the 'phone."

I followed her across the hall to the 'phone-box. It was West. "I've posted you a typewritten report of all I've gleaned to date," he told me, "but I thought you might like to hear the main details a bit quicker."

"Good man, West," I commended. "Say on."

The Rohans, it seemed, had no connection with the famous French family, the similarity of name being purely coincidental. Their father had been a prosperous boot and shoe merchant in Rouen and had died towards the end of the war. Their mother

was still alive. Maurice, the brilliant one, was thirty-eight, Gilles thirty-four and Charles thirty-two. Gilles had married the only daughter of a Rouen Notary in 1947. Maurice and Charles were unmarried, but both were attractive to and attracted by women. Maurice, in fact, had made them his career and had a large number of satisfied patients among the fashionable young married women of Paris. He had medical degrees from Paris and Vienna Universities and had achieved some remarkable results by using hypnotism in obstetrics.

They had all been in Paris during the vital time, but I knew that now and told West to skip that bit. His account of Charles Rohan tallied with that of Teddy Brooks. "How did he blot his copybook in America?" I asked.

"I'm coming to that, sir," said West reproachfully. "It was a queer business all right. He was giving a show in a New York variety theatre and in the course of his performance he invited members of the audience to come on the stage and be hypnotized. Two or three accepted and among them was a man who seemed particularly susceptible. Rohan put him under, made him do the usual silly things, then woke him up. He said to him, 'You're awake now but when the band plays "Old Man River" you'll fall instantly asleep.' He went on with his performance for a bit, hypnotizing the others, then he gave a signal to the band, they burst into 'Old Man River' and, sure enough, his victim fell asleep."

"Sounds pretty elementary stuff," I commented. "A lot of stage hypnotists do that one."

"Yes, but there was a sequel. A week later this man was driving his car up to a holiday cabin he had in the Adirondacks. He had his sister with him, it was late at night, he had the car radio on and a band was playing."

"Oh, good lord!" I exclaimed.

"Yes, sir, you've guessed it. The band played 'Old Man River', he fell asleep at the wheel, the car nose-dived into a ravine and he was killed. His sister escaped with minor injuries."

"I hope she sued Rohan for plenty," I said viciously.

"She did file suit, as they say in America, for a whacking big sum, too, but after a month she withdrew it."

"She withdrew it!"

"So my informant tells me, sir."

"That smells, West. Try to find out why she withdrew it. It might be most important."

"Very good, sir."

I went back to the ballroom. A waltz was just beginning and I made straight for Clare. Once more we circled the room in silence, then I said, "Did you ever have a brother?"

Her chin jerked up. Her eyes, startled, puzzled, met mine. She had a beautifully sculptured and proportioned neck and, when she threw back her head like that, the movement was infinitely graceful. Unconsciously so, perhaps, but I think she must have known because she made use of it so often. It had become a mannerism.

She was laughing at me now, her blue eyes alight with raillery. Perhaps she had decided that was the best way to treat me. "No, Mr. Howard, I never had a brother. I have only a stepfather, the sleeping beauty in the corner there."

"Do you live with him?"

"Only occasionally. I have my own flat."

"How long have you had him?"

"Five years. Mother died three years ago."

"Did she leave any money?"

"Rather a lot and, to save you asking, it was left to me in trust until I reach the age of twenty-five or marry, when I get the capital. I'm twenty-four now."

"And if you should die before your twenty-fifth birthday?"

"Ah, the sixty-four-dollar question! Stepfather gets the lot."

"Does he practise hypnotism, too?"

"Really, Mr. Howard, what a one-track mind you have. George is most respectable, and he's a doctor of science, not medicine. He's a professor at Manchester University." She gave me a bright, mocking smile. "The information bureau is now closing down."

I led her back to her seat, but she did not sit down. "I think I'll go to bed now."

"Lock your door," I said.

"I always do, and don't think I'm sneaking off to Charles. He's strictly *incommunicado* during the Championship."

"He might be *incommunicado* after it, too," I said, which put an effective end to her mockery.

I sat down beside Dr. Palliser and endeavoured to engage him in conversation. He had not danced all evening, but had alternated between leaning back with closed eyes (his black glasses lay on the table before him) and leaning forward to imbibe champagne. He had had rather a lot of champagne, but was not talkative. "You have a very attractive step-daughter," I said.

He opened one eye. "Oh, Clare's all right."

"Independent."

"Very."

"She seems to be somewhat wrapped up in Charles Rohan."

"Quite."

Loquacious bastard, I thought. "Have they known each other long?"

"Long enough."

"Where did they meet?"

He opened the other eye. "Paris. It was a silly business, that. Didn't approve at all. Not that she pays any attention to me."

"Why was it a silly business?"

"You do talk rather a lot, don't you, old chap? We went to one of his shows and when he asked for mugs in the audience to go up and be made fools of, up stepped Clare before I could protest. He made her kiss the leader of the orchestra. That's when it all started." He closed both eyes again and leaned back, thus intimating that the palaver was finished.

"Were you in Paris with her recently?" I pursued.

"Yes. Do have some champagne." I gave it up and soon afterwards the party disintegrated and Lenore and I went up to bed.

"You've got your hanging face on," she said. "What have you ferreted out?"

"Two things of interest," I told her. "Dr. Palliser has a motive, too, the sordid one of money; and Charles Rohan caused the death of a man in America."

"Murder?"

"Accident. His sister sued Rohan for damages then withdrew the suit. I'd like very much to know why she withdrew it."

"Do you think Charles could have influenced her by hypnotism?"

"It's possible, I suppose."

"She might have fallen in love with him."

"That's possible, too."

"The sister couldn't have been *l'Inconnue*, by any chance?"

"No, she says she never had a brother."

"Could she be lying?"

"I don't think so, but I'll soon find out. West's working on it."

Lenore was seated in front of the dressing-table and as I removed my shoes and carried them towards the door, I was conscious of her eyes watching me in the mirror. They were suddenly stricken with fright. "What are you going to do?" she asked, her voice urgent.

"Put my shoes out."

"Let me do it."

I halted. "Darling," I said, "don't get worked up about this. As I said before, no one's going to shoot at me in a hotel corridor. The last thing our murderer wants is to have murder suspected."

"Famous last words."

"It's only common sense, Lenore."

"Then why was the gun taken?"

"Self protection. It won't be used until the moment of arrest, and it's McKellar who'll be doing the arresting."

"You'd better warn him, then."

"I will." I opened the door. Her eyes were still watching me, strained and uneasy, but the corridor was empty.

I laid down my shoes just outside the door, then, farther down the corridor, a door closed softly. I whipped inside, pushed the door ajar and stood beside it, listening. Footsteps approached, quick, light footsteps; furtive footsteps. Lenore had risen and stood watching me, her hands clenched. There was no colour in her cheeks. "Come away," she implored. "Anthony, lock the door and come away."

I held up my hand for silence, and, as the footsteps came level, I opened the door and looked out. It was Maurice Rohan, a look of lustful anticipation on his face. "Hallo," I said. "Lost your way?"

He looked momentarily disconcerted then he smiled a guilty smile. "We are both men of the world," he said, "and we understand these things. You have not seen me."

"*Compris*," I said, and closed the door. "Maurice," I told Lenore, "on pleasure bent."

"Paying Peggy a visit?"

"I think so."

"*Vive l'Amour.*"

"He didn't look as if he was carrying a gun, anyway."

Lenore sat down at the mirror again and I locked the door. "What's that you're plastering on your face?" I demanded.

"My prize, darling. A new cream guaranteed not to come off on pillows, blankets or husbands."

"I should hope not."

She leaned closer to the mirror. "Look," she said in a sorrowful tone, "a grey hair."

I placed my hands on her bare shoulders and kissed the back of her neck. "Darling, did I put it there?"

"Time put it there," she said, "so don't reproach yourself, Anthony. Don't ever reproach yourself." She stood up, turned and came quickly into my arms. The new cream is not a success. It does come off on husbands.

Next morning when I came downstairs, I found Clare curled up on a sofa in the lounge, engrossed in a book. She was wearing a tweed skirt in an attractive pattern of fawn and lilac and a lilac sweater a size too small, which I thought rather naughty of her. But then, of course, she was dressing to please a Frenchman. She pleased me, too.

I approached her from behind and saw that the book was the collected poems of John Keats. "And how long have you been in love with easeful Death?" I said.

She gave a little start and looked up at me with that faunlike jerk of her chin, her blue eyes shadowed. "What was that?"

" 'The Ode to the Nightingale'," I told her. I took the book from her unresisting hand, turned up the passage and read part of the verse aloud:

> " 'Darkling, I listen; and for many a time
> I have been half in love with easeful Death.
> Call'd him soft names in many a mused rhyme,
> To take into the air my quiet breath;
> Now more than ever seems it rich to die,
> To cease upon the midnight with no pain—'

"Have you ever felt the urge to commit suicide?" I rapped.

"Once," she said, her guard down. She was not properly awake yet.

"When?"

"Oh, a long time ago when I was a very young girl."

"Over a man?"

"No. It was silly. I don't want to talk about it. Have *you* ever wanted to commit suicide?"

"Yes."

"Have you really? We could have such a lot in common, couldn't we? What was your trouble?"

"I don't want to talk about it either."

She gave a half laugh. "All this intense conversation just from the 'Ode to the Nightingale'. Did you sleep well?"

"Yes, thank you. And you?"

"I always sleep well."

"You must have a clear conscience, or none at all. Is Charles down yet?"

"Charles has gone ages ago, up to the practice ground. He is not interested in me this morning. He wants to be alone with his driver and several dozen golf balls. I think that man wants to speak to you."

I turned to see McKellar darkening the doorway. "I think he does," I said. "Excuse me."

McKellar was looking bleak as the northern winter which was a good sign. "I've never praised ye before," he said, "and I don't suppose I ever will again, but I'm a fair-minded man and I've got to say it. I take off my hat to ye."

"He knew her, then?"

"He knew her all right."

"But he wouldn't admit it?"

"His lips said no but his eyes said yes. What put ye on to it?"

"A hunch."

"I know your hunches. They're usually based on more than guesswork. That lassie ye were talking to just now. Is she the one ye expected to find with her.toes turned up?"

"That one's based on guesswork," I parried.

"But it's right?"

"Yes."

There was a long silence then he said, "Tell."

There was another silence, then, "All right," I yielded, "I think I will. Have you ever heard of *l'Inconnue de la Seine?*"

"Yes." The affirmative was crisp, uncompromising, triumphant. I could sense that McKellar was very pleased with himself.

"Where did you hear about her?"

"From Inspector Damien of the Sûreté."

"Oh!"

He almost smiled then, but not quite. "I 'phoned Paris last night to see if ye'd been in touch with the French police while ye were there. I struck oil first time."

"Now it's my turn to take off my hat," I said.

"Ye've got some bee in your bonnet about hypnotism. What is it?"

I told him, without reservation, the whole story of *l'Inconnue* up to the time I had left her side a few minutes before. He heard me out in a characteristic silence then he said, "It won't do."

"Why not?"

"It wouldn't stand up in court."

"You haven't identified that girl yet?"

"No."

"Suppose you do succeed in identifying her and can trace a connection between her and Charles Rohan, what then?"

"We'd still need proof he murdered her by hypnotism and proof will not be easy."

"I grant you that. The police surgeon said she was not a virgin. She wasn't pregnant, by any chance?"

"No."

"So that does away with one motive for suicide?"

"There could be other motives. All the evidence goes to show that she committed suicide."

"In her new clothes?"

McKellar stroked his chin. "Ye have a point there," he conceded.

"I asked the police surgeon if there were any marks of violence and he said none that had anything to do with her death. What did he mean by that?"

"She'd had her left arm broken some time ago."

"Ah!" I exclaimed.

He glared at me. "What's in your tortuous mind now?"

"I don't know, Mac. I don't know, but it's just possible you might be taking off your hat to me again soon."

"I'd take it off for good if ye'd only stay out of this."

"Listen, Mac," I said, "I know you think a private detective is just one more affliction on a long-suffering world, but I'm not trying to rob you of your prey or of any credit you might be due. I'm trying to save a life, to prevent a repetition of what has happened already."

"Aye," he growled, "just so, but if there is a repetition and ye've kept something back from the police, ye'll not be held blameless." He turned abruptly and walked out. As he passed like the Black Death through the hall, the gong rang for breakfast.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

# THE CHALET CALLED 'ZURICH'

I JUDGE hotels by their breakfasts and that provided by the Marathon Hotel earned top marks. The management had discovered that there were more original dishes than sausage and tomato and the menu made pleasant reading. The long room was pretty full but there were gaps here and there where competitors had gone early to practice and their womenfolk had overslept.

Clare was already in her place and she was joined shortly by Gilles and Heloise. A few minutes later Maurice arrived looking as if he had received bad news. He scarcely spoke to the others and presently concealed himself behind a morning paper.

"The night has not been fruitful," commented Lenore.

"I don't think it's that," I said. "Something's shaken him."

"Perhaps he's just not at his best in the mornings."

We applied ourselves to grilled kidney and bacon, helped it down with delicious coffee and we had just reached the cigarette stage when Peggy Sinclair came in. She did not look at Maurice although it was plain that she saw him, but took a seat at the far end of the room and began to study the menu. There was a half sly, half demure expression on her face, her lipstick had been carelessly applied and there were dark shadows under her eyes.

"She looks as if she's suffering from a surfeit of *la muerte chiquita,*" I remarked.

Lenore giggled. I thought it very pleasant that we both had a sense of humour and could laugh together at the same things. Very pleasant indeed. Then I noticed that Peggy was watching us, her cheeks scarlet with embarrassment. She must have guessed we had been talking about her and her conscience had done the rest.

I looked round the room, studiously avoiding Peggy's indignant eye, and recognized several professional golfers whose names were household words among the cognoscenti. They were not all of the same nationality but they all had the same scrubbed, out-door look, and none of them could have

worn a lounge suit without appearing ill at ease. They did not linger over breakfast but rose one by one and hastened out of the dining-room as if suffering from a sudden attack of claustrophobia.

The Rohans and Clare were now deep in conversation and from the way they were gesticulating they were speaking French. Maurice had put away his paper but the grim, strained look was still on his face. I noticed that Heloise seemed particularly eloquent.

"Heloise is an agonist," I pronounced.

"Gilles is a realist," said Lenore.

"Charles is an individualist," I supplied, keeping it going.

"Clare is a—a hedonist," returned Lenore, unkindly.

"Maurice is a perfectionist," I decided, noting the exclusive cut of his sports jacket, the cream silk handkerchief in the breast-pocket to match the cream nylon shirt, the crimson bow-tie, tied with the art that conceals art.

At that moment Dr. Palliser strode into the room, looking as if he had slept the clock round. "What about him?" asked Lenore.

"X, the unknown quantity," I suggested.

"Now that we've got them all classified," said Lenore, "shall we adjourn?"

West's report awaited me in the letter-rack in the hall and, as I lifted it out, I noted that there was a letter for Charles. It was a small white envelope with a Marseilles postmark and, looking round carefully to ensure that I was unobserved, I picked it up and felt it all over. The contents felt like a thin piece of pasteboard about three inches by two and I held the envelope up to the light. It looked like a photograph of some kind.

"Yield not to temptation," said Lenore, watching me. "Some of them may have seen that."

I sighed and replaced the envelope in the rack. "You're always so right," I complained, "but I'd risk a lot to see what's inside that. I'll wait till he's lifted it and search his room for it later."

We found a vacant sofa in the lounge and I read West's report. There was nothing in it beyond what he had told me the previous night, and I made some notes on the margin about points I wanted clarified. Lenore provided herself with a morning paper and was quiet for quite a time.

"Nothing much in the paper about that girl," she said at last. "Just a paragraph that she hasn't been identified yet and a suggestion that any hotel or boarding housekeeper who has mislaid a guest might notify the police."

"I'm working on that."

"The identification?"

"Uhuh."

"Another hunch?"

"A strong one. Excuse me while I call up West."

West sounded a trifle apprehensive when I said I had more orders for him, but he bore up well. I was really very lucky to be able to afford someone like West to do the leg work. It left me free to use the little grey cells. "I want the name of the sister of the man who was killed in that car crash," I said, "her description and full details of the injuries she received. As soon as possible, West."

"Very good, sir. Anything else?"

"Yes. Anything you can get on Dr. George Palliser. He's a scientist and a Professor at Manchester University, but I want the other information first."

"I'll get on to it right away."

I went back to Lenore, who was still engrossed in her newspaper. "The golf correspondent of this paper tips Charles to win," she informed me. "He's second favourite in the betting."

"Don't waste your money," I said.

"You *have* got it in for Charles."

"I've got it in for whoever drowned that girl. Let's take a walk on the pier."

To judge from the crowds, the pier was a popular addendum to the many attractions of Fairlake. Children abounded, sucking lollipops or ice cream cones and getting in everybody's way, while mothers knitted in deck-chairs or on side-seats and fathers took their ease behind newspapers. Plump girls in summer frocks, slim girls in slacks, young men in open-necked shirts, elderly men in dark suits, a sprinkling of parsons, wickedly gay in panama hats, promenaded endlessly upon the echoing planks while seagulls soared overhead, selecting their targets.

From the Floral Hall, a glass-roofed building near the end of the pier, came the strains of music, and we peeped in at

the open door. Who were these that were arrayed in white robes? Lo, they were the ladies' orchestra, long in the tooth, solemn of mien, aggressively virginal, honouring Strauss.

"Like to go in?" asked Lenore.

I shuddered and led the way to the end of the pier. I was concerned with a different kind of murder.

The tide was out and around and beyond the pier stretched the yellow sands, smooth, sempiternal, serene. Far out, a cavalcade went by at the trot, reins jingling; riders (mostly girls in jodhpurs, yellow scarves and black velvet jockey caps) urging their mounts along the margin of the sea so that the hooves kicked up rainbow fountains of water. Laughter echoed hollow under the sky and the shrill piping of children made a perpetual chorus. It seemed a far cry from murder yet the very tranquillity of the scene was somehow sinister.

The end of the pier was railed off but the railing was not high. A child could have climbed it. There was a gate in the centre, giving to an iron ladder clamped to one of the wooden uprights, leading downwards, but the gate was padlocked. I tried it and a burly man wearing a blue fisherman's jersey, blue serge trousers, moved uneasily on a nearby seat. The words 'Life Guard' were stencilled in white across the front of the jersey.

I smiled at him. "It's all right," I said, "I'm not thinking of jumping over."

"Wouldn't do you much good, sir, with the tide out."

"It didn't do that girl much good with the tide in. I read about her in the papers. Pity you weren't around when that happened."

"She must have done it after the pier closed. We ain't on duty then."

I turned away. On my right, looking towards the pier entrance, was a vita glass café and the Floral Hall. On my left stood a theatre with a turquoise dome. Its architecture was unmistakably Victorian and it was plastered with bills announcing that the Fairlake Follies performed there twice nightly. Beyond the pier the promenade stretched north and south as far as the eye could reach, separated from the main coastal road by formal gardens. On the far side of the road stood a row of hotels of which the Marathon was one. North of the pier they were built mostly of yellow brick; south, of

red brick. They were of all shapes and sizes but most were set in their own well-kept gardens and the effect was, on the whole, pleasing.

"It's an attractive little place," commented Lenore, following my gaze.

"Yes," I agreed, "but seaside resorts always make me think of Tennyson's Land of the Lotus Eaters. There seems to be a continual vibration in the air, made up of innumerable background noises; the sea, the gulls, the voices of thousands of people, music, the traffic. . . . It's a dull, hollow, unreal sound, you feel it rather than hear it and it has a distinctly soporific effect."

Lenore stood with her head on one side, listening. "Yes, it's like the sound you hear when you put one of those large conch shells to your ear. What would you like to do now?"

"Go on the sands, I think. I'd like a look at the pier from underneath."

We passed out through the turnstiles and descended by a short flight of steps to the beach below. At first we had to pick our way with care, past crawling children and recumbent adults, but as we neared the water's edge the sands grew firmer and damper and emptier. "What are you looking for?" asked Lenore.

"Whatever comes my way," I said and looked up at the pier. Just above me, balancing precariously on two of the cross-timbers, heads almost touching the underside of the pier, were four men; two uniformed constables, a red-faced man in plain clothes and Detective-Inspector McKellar. McKellar was haranguing the others who seemed to be hanging on his words.

"Look at Scotland Yard, lording it among the small fry," I commented.

There was no need to hail McKellar for he would see me sooner or later. Sooner or later he saw everything. I lit a cigarette and waited. "Well, that's how I see it," I heard McKellar say, "but it's up to you." He glanced down at me and without changing his tone said: "Come up. Ladder at the end of the pier."

I glanced apologetically at Lenore and she gave me a little push. "Do what the man says," she said. "I won't run away."

The ladder was the one I had observed from the top of the

pier and, climbing half-way up, I moved out gingerly along one of the strengthening timbers to beyond the first upright. The wood was green and slippery with seaweed and I was a little chary of my game leg but I made it without much difficulty. "This is Mr. Howard," announced McKellar, introducing me to the red-faced man. "Detective-Inspector Hillary of the County Police. Mr. Howard is a private detective," he warned.

Detective-Inspector Hillary extended two fingers. "How do?" he said, as if he couldn't have cared less. He had a sharp nose and looked as if he lived up to it.

McKellar nodded towards the nearest upright. "That interest ye?" he asked.

'That' was a woman's hatpin with a bright blue knob sticking out of the upright. I moved up close to it and McKellar said sharply, "Don't touch!"

"What do you take me for?" I said. I studied the hatpin. "This hasn't been here long. No rust."

Detective-Inspector Hillary tittered. "School of Sherlock Holmes," he sneered.

"Mr. Howard is a friend of mine," said McKellar, surprisingly, and the inspector subsided.

McKellar waited and when I made no further comment, he said: "The hat was washed in this morning. It fits."

"What colour?"

"Blue."

"That fits, too. No handbag yet?"

"No."

"I know what you're thinking. She left a suicide note pinned by that hatpin and it blew or was washed away."

"Blew. The sea doesn't come up this height."

"If a person could make her drown herself, the same person could make her write a suicide note."

"The operative word is if."

"Well, it's gone now, anyway."

McKellar hunched his high, wide shoulders. "It was gey breezy that night. The wind could easily have torn the note loose and blown it away."

"In which direction?"

"Inland. We'll search for it, of course."

"It could have blown far enough by now and the beach is littered with papers. I don't envy you the job."

"If it's there we'll find it." He took the hatpin out gingerly without touching the knob and stuck it in the lapel of his jacket.

"If her fingerprints are on it," I said, "I suppose that will be conclusive."

"Aye, just so."

"Suicide?"

"In the absence of evidence to the contrary."

"Tell me something, Mac. What are you doing in this, anyway? Surely the local police don't have to call in the Yard to deal with what looks like an obvious case of suicide."

"I happened to be on the spot."

"I still don't get it."

"I'm acting in an unofficial capacity."

I looked pointedly at the hatpin in his lapel. "Horse-feathers," I said.

"If I like a busman's holiday, that's nobody's concern but mine."

"You never took a holiday in your life, but forget I asked. Could she have come up here at low tide the same way I did and waited till the tide came in?"

"Not likely. It was daylight at low tide and someone would have seen her. Either she found her way on to the pier after it was closed, which would have meant climbing the turnstiles, or else she was on the pier before it closed and concealed herself there till the pier staff had gone."

"Then climbed over the gate and down the ladder to the under side of the pier?"

"Aye. She was a determined lassie."

"Or acting under a compulsion not her own. Could she have climbed up from the sands at the other end?"

"Look for yourself. It's fenced off to keep children away and the fence has a barbed wire top."

"Yes, I see that. Has no one come forward to identify her yet?"

"No."

"No reports of anyone missing from one of the hotels?"

"Two cases of guests who've scarpered without paying their bills, but neither of them answers her description."

"And what about the official 'missing persons' list?"

"Nothing."

"The girl nobody knew."

"There's one that knew her."

"Yes, and he's away happily playing golf."

"Aye, just so." He paused for a long moment, his grim face inscrutable, then his gaze challenged mine. "It was suicide, Mr. Howard."

I met his look squarely. "Do you know what I think, Mac?" I said. "I think you don't believe it was suicide and you're challenging me to prove that it wasn't. You hope I'll succeed *because you want Charles Rohan.*"

"If ye think it was murder, it's up to ye to prove it."

"What do you want him for?"

"I've got nothing on him."

"Yes, that's your trouble, isn't it?"

He turned away. "I'll not keep ye any longer from your good lady."

"All right, Mac, I can take a hint. I could bear to see that suicide note if you find it."

"If we find it ye'll see it. Good day to ye."

"Good hunting." I nodded to the others and headed landwards along the slippery beam. The upward slope of the sand towards the promenade made the drop much easier at that end but, notwithstanding, my leg gave under me when I jumped. The next moment Lenore, all solicitude, was helping me to my feet. "Darling, are you all right?"

"Of course."

"You will forget about that leg of yours."

"I only wish I could." I told her about the hatpin and we spent a fruitless hour picking up stray pieces of paper along the beach under the curious gaze of hundreds of holidaymakers.

At last Lenore rebelled. "Leave it to Detective-Inspector McKellar," she said. "He can recruit a whole corps of police to help him."

"Looks as if he'll have to," I agreed, and we gave it up.

Our peregrinations along the beach had taken us to the northern limits of the town where the hotels had given place to trim villas sheltering between reed-covered sand dunes. In front of the dunes, facing the sea, was a line of wooden chalets connected by a board walk.

There were twelve of them, each with the name of a

different Swiss resort painted in white letters above the door and at all of them, save one, the doors were open and the occupants sunning themselves on the sands. There were one or two couples but family parties predominated. Some lay sun-bathing on rugs, some sat in deck-chairs, others squatted round a tablecloth enjoying a picnic lunch. It was a pleasant, happy little scene, but my eye was caught by that one closed door at the far end of the row.

Lenore, who had taken my arm, must have felt me stiffen for she looked at me curiously and said, "Inspiration again?"

"Could be," I said, aware of the old excitement welling up inside me, the familiar, inner prompting too urgent to ignore.

Beyond the chalets was a notice-board intimating that they could be hired by the week for three pounds ten each and that application should be made to the Fairlake Town Hall.

"If she didn't come from a hotel or a private house where there were other people to miss her," I said, "she might very well have come from one of these."

I went up to the closed chalet, which bore the name 'Zurich', and tried the door. It was locked, and as I turned away I met the suspicious gaze of a fat *paterfamilias* who was filling a deck-chair in front of the adjoining chalet. He had two slim daughters in topless beach frocks, lying on their tummies, backs glistening with oil; a not so slim wife, unsuitably clad in a bright green Bikini; and a small son, engaged with tremendous solemnity in the construction of a sand fortress.

"Is this one let, too?" I asked.

The man removed his pipe and spat into the sand. "They've all been fully let for months," he revealed with relish. "Waiting list a mile long."

"What a pity!" I said. "They look so attractive, too. Do you live in them?"

"Be like the black hole of Calcutta if we did. They ain't meant for livin' in, just daily use. There's a cooking stove and you can have your meals, but that's all."

His wife looked up from her crocheting. "There's a little room at the back with a camp-bed in," she announced.

"And a fine lot we'd look, five in a camp-bed," sneered her husband.

The woman jerked her head towards the closed chalet. "She sleeps in hers."

"That's different. She's on her own."

"She must sleep the clock round," put in one of the girls. "I haven't seen her around for two days."

"Mebbe she's gone to the golf," contributed her sister.

"None of our business where she's gone," pronounced *paterfamilias* and his daughters retired crushed.

I looked at the chalet then leered at him. "A good place to entertain the boy-friend," I commented.

"Didn't see any boy-friend."

"She didn't look happy," remarked the woman, looking at Lenore.

Her husband snorted. "Women!" he snarled. "Always imagining things. She looked all right to me."

"She didn't look happy," repeated the woman firmly.

I looked at her, bulging in her ridiculous Bikini, and she looked placidly back. She had dark, deep-set eyes and there was pain behind them. She was a woman who had known unhappiness and could recognize it in others.

"What's she like?" I asked gently.

"A smasheroo," said the man, gloatingly.

His wife looked at him briefly and the pain behind her eyes was explained. Hubby was still sowing his oats. "She's—very lovely," she said in a low voice. "Reddish fair, she is, with blue eyes and a lovely skin. I'd give a lot to have a skin like hers."

The small boy put the finishing touch to his fortress and sat back on his heels. "She's an American," he piped.

They were on to him at once. "How d'you know?" demanded several voices.

"She spoke to me. Day before yesterday it was. In the morning. She came out and give me a smile and said, 'Hallo, Junior.' She spoke just like them Hollywood film stars."

"You never told us," his mother reproached him.

"Didn't know you was interested."

I decided it was time to end it. "Well, if the chalet's let, it's no use thinking about it," I said, "but thanks very much anyway." I was acutely conscious of their combined stares as we trudged away through the sand.

After a few minutes' silence I said thoughtfully, "The description fits."

"I thought it did from your face. Next stop the Town Hall?"

I nodded, but when we reached the Town Hall it had closed down for the week-end. "We close at noon on Saturdays," the caretaker informed me, "and open again nine o'clock Monday morning."

There were very few in for lunch and Betty Beamish was inclined to be lugubrious about it. "We have to arrange meals for these golf pros at all sorts of times," she said, "and it will be worse next week with the Championship on. The Catering Wages Act makes it bloody difficult but we try to do what we can."

None of the Rohans was in evidence and I noticed that the letter addressed to Charles was still on the letter-rack. I was tempted again but did not fall and after we had eaten I got out the Rolls and we drove up to the golf course. There was much more activity today, the car park was almost full and a considerable crowd was milling about the course.

Four men came off the last green with their caddies and Lenore grabbed my arm excitedly. "Look, Anthony, isn't that Henry Cotton?"

It was indeed Henry Cotton and I was sorry that he was finishing and not starting. I would dearly have loved to watch him play. With him were Fred Daly, Cerda, the Argentinian, and when I saw the fourth man my heart gave a pleasurable leap. He took me back to the great days before the war when the finest golfers of America had come over in strength. I had watched him before with admiration and had not hoped to see him again on this side of the Atlantic. He looked as gay and light-hearted as ever and very little older. He was wearing fawn plus fours, dark brown stockings and a baseball cap made of straw with a green lined skip. He was Gene Sarazen.

I watched them into the clubhouse and turned sadly away conscious of inexorable time. A concentration of people in the open ground left of the clubhouse caught my eye and we walked over in that direction. A hard-bitten, middle-aged professional was demonstrating his skill by driving golf balls into a net, watched with considerable awe by golf fans of all ages.

He had roped off a space large enough for his purpose and had put up a notice inviting the public to patronize 'Bert Rattray's Golf School'. We watched while, urged on by gasps of admiration, he hit twelve perfect drives into the waiting net, then he turned to the spectators and invited all and sundry to

'have a go'. Two middle-aged men looked at each other, hesitated, then stepped inside the ropes. Bert Rattray relieved them of half a crown each, allowed them to choose a driver and gave them each twelve well-used golf balls.

The first man teed up a ball, topped it badly, teed up another, missed it, tried again and hooked it into the net. Rattray swaggered up to him, flexed his arm muscles for the benefit of the gallery, winked at them and proceeded to show the would-be champion where he had gone wrong. The man tried again without much better result and Rattray, waving him contemptuously aside, went through the same routine with the other man. Then, having reduced them both to a state of hopeless misery, he called for another volunteer.

I felt my palms itch, shifted my feet doubtfully and then Lenore said in my ear, "Go on, you know you're dying to."

In the days when I had played golf regularly, driving had been my particular forte. My short game was erratic, my long game through the green not always accurate, but off the tee I was the envy of my golfing friends. I have unusually long arms for my height and over the years had perfected a swing that had enabled me to hit the ball a long, long way. Rattray had ridiculed the golfing rabbits to gain a few cheap laughs from the crowd and I felt that he could do with a lesson in manners. It did not need Lenore's prompting to induce me to step forward.

The smile on Rattray's face was the smile on the face of the tiger and, as I handed my jacket to Lenore, selected a suitable driver and took up my stance, he prepared to give the gallery another treat. Fortunately I was wearing rubber-soled shoes and the moment the first ball left my club I knew everything was going to be all right. I had not handled a club for some time but apparently my eye was in for I hit twelve real beauties. The crowd cheered me to the echo and when I had finished, Rattray's face was a study in mortification. I paid him another half-crown, demanded and was reluctantly given another twelve balls, and proceeded to repeat my success.

When the last one had gone whistling on its way, Rattray came up and almost snatched the driver out of my hands. "I don't know what your game is," he whispered savagely, "but you've outstayed your welcome."

I grinned at him and when I rejoined Lenore, three schoolboys asked for my autograph. Lenore was greatly amused and said I should have signed 'Ben Hogan' as 'Anthony Howard' would only puzzle them. I said: "Do you think I'm daft? As a matter of fact, I signed 'Sam Snead'," and at that moment I felt a tap on my shoulder.

I turned round with rather a guilty start, fearing my duplicity had been discovered, and found myself confronted by Charles Rohan. He, too, had 'the smile on the face of the tiger'.

"A man of gifts, I see," he purred, and the silky malevolence of his voice set all my nerves a-tingle. "Would you be pleased to follow me?"

"Why?"

"You will see." I walked beside him to the club's practice ground which was not at the moment in use and Absalom, the deaf and dumb Algerian caddie, appeared as if from nowhere and followed like a dog at his heels.

"Have you been here all day?" I asked, making conversation.

"No, an hour or two only, in the morning. I have just this minute come back from the hotel, in time to witness the end of your demonstration."

He made a sign to Absalom and the caddie ran off ahead of us and took up a position about two hundred and eighty yards away. "Absalom makes an excellent retriever," said Charles. "Let us give him some work to do."

He was carrying a driver in the crook of his arm and, with a flourish, he handed it to me. "We are almost of a height," he said, "so this driver should suit you very well."

It was a beautifully balanced club with a laminated head and a graded shaft. The weight was just right and I had several practice swings to get the feel of it. A number of interested sightseers gathered round the practice tee to watch us and I began to feel uneasy and embarrassed. "What's this in aid of?" I asked.

"Just a little lesson," said Charles smoothly. He produced a number of golf balls from his pockets, handed one to me and dropped the others on the grass. "Hit this one for me," he invited.

I took the peg tee he gave me and, without wasting time,

drove off. It was one of my best drives, straight as a rifle barrel, rising gradually till, at the limit of its flight, the ball seemed to hover, a white speck against the blue, fighting the pull of gravity. When it landed, it bounded on and on over the hard ground, coming to rest almost at Absalom's feet.

Charles made no comment but kicked another ball across to me. This time I did not do so well, the ball fading to the left and finishing well short of the first one. I returned the club to Charles. "Thank you," I said. "I think I've had enough now."

"You have shot your bolt?"

"I don't think I could improve on my first one."

"So." He teed up a ball, addressed it with confidence and hit it with power and glory. I noticed he favoured the shut-faced style, which needs strength beyond the ordinary. His swing was long and free, his hands whipped through with amazing speed and finished very high, his left foot stayed down all the time and he kept his left side wonderfully braced. The ball landed close to where my first drive had finished and ran on about thirty yards beyond. "Nice timing," I said.

He raked the other balls close to him, teed them up one after the other and treated me to an exhibition of machine-like hitting such as I had not believed possible. The power and precision of each shot and the lithe grace of his swing left the spectators breathless. Every ball split the fairway and the worst of them finished a good twenty yards beyond the better of my two.

When he had dispatched the last ball, he turned to me, smiling that tigerish smile again. "You see, Mr. Howard, between the average professional and the most gifted amateur there is a great gulf fixed. That is true of most things in life." He paused. "It is true, I should imagine, of police work." He paused again to let his words sink in then added, speaking quietly but with menace, "I hope the lesson will be learned."

I looked at him for quite a while without replying but his eyes did not flinch from mine. Then I said, "The lesson will not be—lost sight of." I can speak quietly and with menace, too.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

# THE PHOTOGRAPH

LENORE helped me on with my jacket and fell into step beside me as I walked towards the car park. She respected my silence until I had put the Rolls in motion then she said, "That was quite a demonstration."

"Yes."

"And all so friendly, too."

"Yes."

"On the surface." I didn't answer that one and she added: "It's a good thing it was done with golf clubs and not guns. You've fairly got Charles' goat."

"Not me," I denied. "That letter. He's been back to the hotel, read his letter and hasn't liked it. He came up here again feeling murderous and looking for someone to work it off on. He found me."

"And now you're going back to find the letter?"

"Yes."

"He picked on the wrong man."

"I was going back to look for it anyway."

"He might still have it on him."

"He won't carry any more in his golfing clothes than he has to. His pockets were full of golf balls."

As we drove through the wide main street of the town, Lenore touched my arm. "Anthony, look there! Isn't that Sergeant Flowerdew?"

I looked where she indicated and beheld a familiar, smiling face. The sergeant wasn't smiling at me—he hadn't seen me yet. The smile was habitual. It was almost Oriental in its serenity and I had only once seen him without it, but that is another story.[1] Sergeant Flowerdew was McKellar's trusted lieutenant and I had a theory that it was one of the sergeant's duties to smile for him.

I pulled up the car opposite where he was standing and matched his smile. "Still happy, I see, Sergeant," I said.

[1] *The Angel of Light.*

The smile broadened. "Why, Mr. Howard, and Mrs. Howard, too! How nice to see you again." He paused. "You've cut your honeymoon short?"

"It was too perfect to last."

"Paris is perfect at any time but I believe the Marathon Hotel has a Parisian chef."

"You seem singularly well informed about my movements."

"I'm singularly well informed about most things, Mr. Howard. That's part of my job."

"Is it your job that has brought you to Fairlake?"

"I'm a keen amateur golfer."

"So, I understand, is McKellar. We've been seeing quite a lot of him."

"Oh, is he here, too?"

"Come off it, Sergeant," I said. "You aren't talking to a child."

"The inspector is very interested in golf and this year there's a new Scottish hope, a young professional called Duncan McIntyre who's risen to the top in the last three years. The inspector would very much like to see him win."

"Is that why he's so keen to nobble Charles Rohan?"

The smile flickered but did not die. "If you're a betting man, Mr. Howard, it might be worth your while to risk a pound on McIntyre. He's quoted at ten to one."

I grinned at him. "All right, Sergeant, I shouldn't have asked. Perhaps we'll bump into you again."

"That would be very nice. Good afternoon."

The smile sent us on our way and I said to Lenore: "At a pinch I might believe that McKellar came here to watch the golf but not both of them. There's something big afoot."

"It looks that way," she agreed.

The letter had gone from the rack and I went over to the office where Betty Beamish was drinking tea. "Betty," I said, "how far can I rely on your discretion?"

"All the way, love, all the way. In the hotel business you learn discretion early or you don't stay in the hotel business."

"I want to search Charles Rohan's room."

"Now wait a minute——"

"Me or the police, Betty. Take your choice."

She put down the tea-cup slowly. "You're a tough one,"

she said. "You scare the daylights out of me and that's a fact. What are you after?"

"Just ten minutes in that room and no questions asked."

"The number is seventy-one and he's left his key on the appropriate hook there. What if he comes back?"

"He won't; he's practising his golf, but Lenore will keep watch."

She rose to her feet and gathered up her tea tray. "I'll just remove my tea things to the kitchen and what you do when my back's turned is your own concern."

She walked away at such a pace that the tea things rattled dangerously and Lenore moved to stand between me and the entrance door. "Coast clear," she reported.

I flipped the key from the hook, put it in my pocket and shepherded Lenore to the automatic lift. We rode to the second floor and, ten seconds later, we were inside room seventy-one. No one had seen us.

Charles knew how to take care of his clothes, and no monk in his cloistered cell could have been tidier. His suitcase—empty—was under the bed, his pyjamas lay neatly folded on the pillow, his suits were on hangers in the capacious wardrobe and his shirts, socks and ties occupied separate drawers of the dressing-table. Nothing was left lying about and Lenore said, "I hope this will be an object-lesson to you."

"Keep a lookout from the window, wench," I said, "and don't let yourself be seen—or heard."

There was nothing of interest in any of the pockets nor in any of the drawers. I noticed that Charles patronized a good tailor and there was one suit in particular, a double-breasted affair in light grey gaberdine, that excited my envy. It bore the name of Fuseli Frères of Paris and did that exclusive firm much credit.

"Just to save your time," said Lenore from the window, "what you want is in the waste basket there."

The envelope lay crumpled and torn at the bottom of the basket, surrounded by the shredded fragments of what had been its contents. Some of the fragments were almost as small as confetti but I raked them all together, straightened out the envelope, tipped the pieces in and put the envelope in my pocket.

"Let's go," I said.

"I never was much use at jig-saw puzzles," warned Lenore.

"You will be after this one. Turn down the bed-clothes, darling, and lay out his pyjamas. Then he'll think the chambermaid's been in and emptied the basket."

We borrowed some transparent 'Sellotape' from Betty, retired to our bedroom and got to work. The task of fitting all the pieces together was even more intricate and prolonged than I had thought, but at last it was finished and I held in my hand a photograph, stuck together with the 'Sellotape' but reasonably clear.

It showed a girl in a white evening dress sitting on the rail of the boat-deck of an ocean liner. The face was not very clear because there was a crack right across the bridge of the nose, but it was not the face of the girl in the mortuary. It was not anyone I had seen before. A few yards away, in the act of walking towards her, was Charles Rohan, and the camera had caught to perfection the intent, wolfish look on his face. The girl's expression was difficult to place because of the damage to the photograph, but she was looking straight at Charles and I thought that her eyes were apprehensive.

The photograph had been taken at night, which did not help, although the ship's lights were bright enough and it reminded me of one of those candid camera shots that one sees from time to time so unkindly displayed in the Society journals. Next to the girl I could see part of the bow of a lifeboat, bearing the letters '—ND' which appeared to be the end of the ship's name.

"Know any liners with a name ending in ND?" I asked Lenore.

She shook her head. "You'll have to look up Lloyd's Register. What's on the other side?"

I turned the photograph over. On the back someone had printed in red ink, *'Remember we are depending on you'*.

Lenore's face registered acute disappointment. "What a frost," she said, "after all our trouble, too."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, it's pretty plain, isn't it? Some girl he met on a ship sometime has sent him her photograph with a message of encouragement on the back."

"Encouragement?"

"To win the Championship."

"Or a warning that he'd better not win it."

"He means to win it, Anthony. You've only got to look at him to see that."

"He wants to win it all right, but somebody may have other ideas. There's some pretty big money on this Championship. If it's a message of encouragement, why did she print it?"

"Perhaps she's a poor writer."

"And who are 'we'?"

"Probably her family."

"Look at her face in the photograph. She isn't encouraging him there and look at his. It reminds me of a line from Macbeth, the one about murder moving with Tarquin's ravishing stride towards his design. Neither of them knew that photograph was being taken and it's been sent to him by the person who took it as a threat—a blackmail threat. There's a story behind that photograph and I bet it's a dirty one."

"Anthony, are you not in danger of twisting everything to suit your theories because you dislike Charles so intensely?"

"I don't think so. Charles didn't like receiving that photograph. He didn't like it a bit. It was an angry man's fingers that crumpled that envelope and tore the picture into so many pieces. It was an angry man who came raging up to the golf course and took his spite out on me, an angry man who was the least bit afraid. Psychologically speaking, the behaviour pattern fits that theory like his Fuseli Frères suit fits Charles."

"You may be right," said Lenore doubtfully. "You so often are."

"The problem is what are they depending on him to do—or not to do? And who are they?" I slipped the photograph into my pocket. "Something else for me to get my teeth into, Lenore."

"You've got your teeth into Charles. The chips are down all right."

"They were down from the moment I saw him." The gong sounded for dinner and we began hurriedly to change. I was ready first, as usual, and while waiting for Lenore to put the last, unnecessary, finishing touches to her hair, I sat looking out of the window and smoking a cigarette. My mind was busy but I was not getting very far.

A car turned in through the gates, one of those vast American cars that look like a pregnant whale playing a mouth-organ. Charles was driving, Clare and her stepfather sat in front beside him and behind were Gilles and Maurice with Heloise between them. The car drew up next to my Rolls and they trooped out, Clare hanging on to Charles' arm and chattering away with a desperate vivacity, as if striving to charm him out of his black mood. She was not having much success for he was grim and unresponsive. He had not had a good day.

Maurice fell behind, looking pensive. Palliser seemed lost in his thoughts, but Gilles and Heloise were smiling like a married couple content with each other who had enjoyed their day and were not ashamed to show it. I watched them into the hotel, then Lenore declared that she was ready and we went down to dinner.

In the hall I crossed over to the office to buy an evening paper and met Clare coming away. The others had already gone upstairs but it appeared that her room key had been hung on the wrong hook and it had taken a few minutes to locate it.

"Still here," she said coolly.

"As you see."

"Why don't you spread your wings and fly?"

"I like it here."

"Must I tell you again I don't need a protector?"

"Have you ever been inside a mortuary?"

"No. I understand you have the advantage of me there."

"I could arrange a visit for you if you like."

"No, thank you. I'm sure I wouldn't know the girl either. Was she pretty?"

"In life she had been more than pretty but—she is no longer in life. She may have thought she didn't need a protector either."

"Why did you do that horrible thing to Charles?"

"You know why."

"But this can't possibly have had any connection with what—nearly happened in Paris. Suicide by drowning is all too common."

"The way this drowning happened is less common."

She put a hand on my arm and looked earnestly into my face, her head thrown back, her eyes pleading. "Please go

away, Mr. Howard, I'm really in no danger now. That phase is over. If you go on with this you'll only bring desperate unhappiness to someone."

I shook my head. "I'm sorry."

"You're a fiend."

"I'm the fiend that sticketh closer than a brother."

She turned away from me with a gesture that was half impatience, half despair and almost ran for the stairs. I rejoined Lenore who was waiting patiently at the dining-room door. "What was that all about?" she asked.

"If I pursue my investigations I'll only bring desperate unhappiness to someone."

"Well, I hope it won't be me, darling. Let's go in."

. . . . .

At nine precisely, West telephoned. "Nothing more from America yet," he reported, "but I've got the Rohans' war records."

"They were all heroes of the Resistance, I suppose?"

"That's right, sir. Who isn't nowadays? Maurice joined de Gaulle as an army surgeon and fought in North Africa, France and Germany. He was in it to the end. Charles was a power in the F.F.I., and was noted for some very fancy knifework, crawling up to sentries and cutting their throats; that sort of thing."

"That sounds like Charles," I commented. "That sounds a lot like Charles."

"Heloise was an undercover agent for the F.F.I., and was very good at it, but Gilles is the family hero. He was one of the first to join de Gaulle. There were enough doctors in his unit so he became a combatant and rose to the rank of Major. He won the Croix de Guerre in North Africa."

"Thanks, West."

"Does any of that help, sir?"

"I doubt it, really. I'm looking for a traitor in the woodpile."

"There was never the slightest suspicion of collaboration against any of them. They were fiercely patriotic and I think you may take that as authentic."

"I'll see what I can make of it. Meantime I've another

commission for you. Sorry to pile it on, West, but the plot's beginning to thicken. Can you find out for me when Charles travelled in a ship—it was probably a French ship—with ND as the last letters of her name?"

West promised to see what he could do and I turned thoughtfully away from the telephone. On the face of it, the Rohans had no taint of treason and yet there had been that outburst by Heloise. It had come from deep down, from some unhappy personal experience or present fear.

They were all in the cocktail bar. Maurice, Charles and Dr. Palliser were at a table in the far corner with Heloise and Clare and I was pleased to note that Lenore had joined them. Gilles was sitting on a stool at the bar drinking with a well-known French amateur golfer and as I entered the other man emptied his glass, slapped Gilles on the back and bade him a jovial farewell. I took the vacant stool and Gilles turned to look at me.

"Ah, m'sieu," he greeted. "You will drink with me? A dry Martini, perhaps?"

I drink very little nowadays, and I had already had one or two in the course of the evening, but drinking with people is as quick a way of getting to know them as any and as pleasant. "I shall be delighted to drink with a hero of France," I said.

I could see him thinking that one over. From his heightened colour and the somewhat wild look in his eyes he had had quite a few already but did not seem to be aware of it. A neglected cigarette hung from the corner of his mouth and his tie and the front of his jacket were grey with ash.

"Yes, I am a hero," he said abruptly. "I have the Croix de Guerre." He said it, not proudly, but as a statement of fact.

"My felicitations."

He drained his glass at a gulp and at once ordered himself another. "A hero," he repeated as if to himself. "The President, the newspapers, everyone say I am a hero." Then he burst out: "M'sieu, I am no hero. I just got my men out of a sticky situation, that's all. But I did not get all of them out; not all of them. There was Jules who died that I might get out and be a hero. There were Marcel and Antoine who were riddled with machine-gun bullets, there was Jacques who died of wounds and there was little Pierre—in peace, a pickpocket;

in war, a gallant comrade—who stopped a mortar shell with his chest and was blown to pieces before my eyes.

"They died that I might live to wear my little piece of ribbon, but I do not wear it for myself, m'sieu. I wear it for them, for Jules and Marcel and Antoine and Jacques, who lie buried under the sands of Tripoli, and for Pierre, the pick-pocket, who has no grave and no memorial."

He raised his glass. "To the five men who died for me," he said, making his voice ring out and, suddenly, he was in tears.

I raised my glass also. "And to the eighty-five who died for me," I said quietly.

He wiped his eyes unashamedly and gazed at me. "Eighty-five men died for you, m'sieu?"

"That's right," I confirmed. "I'm a hero, too. I had command of a destroyer once until one night . . ." I shrugged.

"So!" He clinked his glass against mine and we drank. "Now we are friends," he said.

"Blood brothers," I said.

He held up the empty glass and looked a question at me, I nodded and together we threw the glasses into the stone fireplace to the right of the bar. The tinkle of breaking glass electrified the room and every head was turned to stare at us.

The affronted barman hurried over. "Here, gentlemen, please. This won't do, you know."

"It is all right," said Gilles with dignity. "We will pay." He handed over a crisp pound note which the barman accepted and then I felt a tug at my arm. It was Lenore, looking worried. "Anthony, what are you doing?"

"Being heroes together," I said.

"Then come and be heroes beside the rest of us."

As I followed Lenore over to the Rohans' table I thought that, if there was a traitor in the Rohan camp, it was certainly not Gilles. His performance had been very French, but of his sincerity there could be no doubt.

The Rohans were interesting conversationalists and tonight they were in full cry. The talk was of the Comédie Française and of French dramatists and actors generally. The names Feuillère, Barrault, Giraudoux and Frèsnay were freely bandied about and a fierce argument developed as to whether Anouillh was really anti-English. Heloise praised a recent production of O'Neill's *Desire Under the Elms. Desire Sous les*

*Ormes* she called it, and I wondered how that sombre drama would sound in French. Maurice said that he thought the play had been over-produced and the others deferred to his opinions with respect.

I was sitting next to Clare and she said with a sigh, speaking as if to herself, "I wanted very badly once to go on the stage."

"Why didn't you?" I asked.

She shrugged her shapely shoulders. "Oh, life caught up with me."

The talk switched from drama to literature and some famous French writers took quite a beating. The opinion was expressed that Simone de Beauvoir was the brain behind Sartre and then someone mentioned Georges Simenon.

"Ah yes, there is Simenon," said Maurice the knowledgeable one. "He used to write orthodox murder mysteries—you remember his *Inspector Maigret*?—but of recent years he has turned to psychology and it has paid him well. He is now at the height of his considerable powers." He looked across at me. "You write murder mysteries, do you not?"

"Yes," I admitted.

"You find murder interesting?"

"Absorbing."

"And profitable?"

"Sometimes. I find writing about fictional murders helps me in investigating real murders. It keeps me up to scratch."

"Murder, of course, is the crime that has the greatest human interest. One does not get the same kick out of reading about robbery or fraud."

"That's true," I said, "but there are other crimes I would place in the same category as murder."

"Indeed? Let us hear them."

"Well, blackmail for one and then there is—treason."

Maurice replied quickly and yet there was a silence, a tiny silence that screamed an alarm. It was as if, for an instant of time, the pulse of the world had stopped.

"There is something to be said for your point of view," agreed Maurice, "but murder is still the word that sends a chill down the spine."

Charles rose to his feet. "I am for bed," he said abruptly. "Good night all."

"Spartan," remarked Heloise as Charles walked away.

"Charles is dedicated," said Maurice, "until—when is the final round?"

"Friday," I supplied.

"It will be Black Friday if anything goes wrong with his game," said Gilles.

Heloise heaved a somewhat theatrical sigh. "Charles has to be the best," she said. "It is a fault in him but without it he would not be Charles."

The party broke up quite soon after that and upstairs in our bedroom I aroused Lenore's suspicions by declaring that I could do with some fresh air.

"In other words, you want to go off for a walk by yourself," she accused.

"In other words," I agreed.

"The last time you did that look where it brought us. Anthony, why can't I come, too?"

"I want to see how easy it is to get left behind on the pier after it closes for the night. If I succeed I'll have to get off by the same route I used this morning and that's a little too athletic for you, darling."

"Why do you want to get left on the pier?"

"Atmosphere. I want to try and reconstruct the crime."

"That means you're going to let your emotions play hell with you again."

"I promise to keep my emotions under control."

She came forward, placed her hands on my shoulders and kissed me gravely. "Run along," she said, "and don't let anyone get behind you."

The pier was quiet and dimly lighted and in view of the lateness of the hour, the man at the turnstiles waved me in without mulcting me of the usual threepence. I noted that it would have taken a very slim person indeed to climb over the turnstiles when they were closed. There were a few couples canoodling in corners and the two cafés were still doing business but the Floral Hall was dark. The theatre lights were still on, however, and I could hear an occasional gust of laughter as the comedian registered a hit. It was twenty-five past ten.

I moved on to the end of the pier, which was deserted. The tide was in and the water slapped against the piles and

retreated with a horrible sucking sound. I leaned over the rail and looked down. The water was black and oily and wholly uninviting and yet, if one looked long, one became aware of its fascination. It was as if the water exerted some strange hypnotic influence of its own, a siren song, audible only to the inner ear.

It was then that an inconsistency in the suicide theory struck me with some force. Why had the girl found it necessary to climb over the rail, descend the ladder to the lower section of the pier, work her way back along the slimy beam till she found an upright to which she could pin her suicide note—all in pitch darkness, too—and then jump into the waiting arms of the sea?

Why had she not simply jumped from the top of the pier, leaving her note pinned to the wooden rim of the rail? Suppose there had been someone with her, to see her off, as it were, in case she should baulk when she came to the jump. The murderer and his puppet; for a puppet, if my suspicions were justified, was what she would be. A Zombie, with no will of her own, manipulated, manœuvred and persuaded, perhaps gently assisted, to her watery grave.

The café on my left was closing its doors and from the theatre came the strains of the National Anthem. Presently the audience began to stream out and the tramp, tramp of many feet resounded from the boards. It was a hollow, cheerless sound, gradually receding. One by one the theatre lights went out and I slipped out of sight into the narrow space between the end wall of the theatre and the railing of the pier. I heard the voices of pier attendants but nobody came near and at last there was nothing but the stillness of the night, broken only by the gurgle of water under the pier.

I relaxed and emerged from my hiding-place. I was aware of loneliness but I was not alone. She was there beside me, walking as if in a dream in her blue hat and neat little suit. I spoke to her aloud, coaxing her towards the rail, telling her in a low, soothing voice that there was nothing else left for her, that the sea would be kind, that soon her troubles would be over. I watched her jump. I even heard the splash and looked round to make sure that there was no one else to hear.

Then I went over the rail, down the ladder and along the transverse beam below. I paused at the upright where the

hatpin had been, feeling the chill breeze on my face. I had not noticed the breeze much up top, but here it was channelled and concentrated, a howling draught that could easily have snatched the note from the hatpin and carried it, fluttering, away.

Why pin it up down here? Perhaps the murderer had hoped the body would not be found for some time, until after the Championship, for instance, when he would have left the district. When the body turned up, a search would be made and the note and the hatpin found. That would ensure a suicide verdict and he would be in the clear. He had not bargained for the body coming ashore so soon and for the note being blown away.

I made my way landwards. The blackness under the pier was absolute and, although I had taken the precaution of bringing a flashlight, I did not want to attract attention by using it. After all, I had no business to be there. Once my foot slithered on the slime, almost precipitating me into the water, but I recovered myself in time. A few more steps and I was well past high-water mark and this time, when I jumped, the sand sustained me.

I should have gone straight back to the hotel but my steps did not lead me in that direction. Almost of their own volition they led me northwards along the beach to where the chalet called 'Zurich' waited in the shadow of the dunes.

## CHAPTER NINE

# THE LETTER

THE row of chalets was dark, the beach deserted. I prowled around 'Zurich', peering through the windows, listening for signs of life. Behind me the slow wavelets rippled at the water's edge; in front the dunes stood out, stark against the night, crowned by stiff grasses as sharp as stilettoes. A pallid half-moon rose out of the dark sea.

I had taken the precaution of slipping into my pocket the black gloves I had borrowed for my 'Invisible Man' masquerade—just in case I should yield to temptation—and, pulling them on, I tried the door. It was still locked, but the lock was flimsy and when I shook the door it rattled. I put my shoulder to it and heaved. It gave at the second heave, the woodwork cracking like a pistol-shot in the silence. I drew back and listened for a few seconds but there was no reaction of any kind. I might have been alone on a desert island. None the less, I had a good look round before going in, for not even my Cousin George, who is now an Assistant Commissioner at Scotland Yard and proud of it, could save me from a charge of breaking and entering; let alone McKellar.

I pushed the door to behind me and shone my flash. It was a shabby little shack with bare floor and walls, a 'primus' stove in one corner, a small folding-type table in the other. There were two or three canvas chairs and nothing else but the sickly-sweet odour of dry rot. A door in the opposite wall gave to another small room, little more than a cubicle, in which were a camp-bed, another chair and a fly-blown mirror. A powder-blue, plastic waterproof hung from a hook behind the door. Another door opened on a tiny wash-basin and an 'Elsan' closet.

Beside the bed was a green canvas suitcase covered with continental hotel labels. It was unlocked and when I opened it an emanation of perfume, faint but fragrant, stole into the room. It was almost as if the spirit of the dead girl had moved in beside me and my hands shook as I rummaged in the case.

I would never forget that grey, pathetic little face on the mortuary slab.

The case was filled with feminine clothes: nylon blouses, wispy 'undies', stockings, a tweed skirt, a couple of frocks. A pocket in the lining contained a bottle of nail varnish, a jar of skin cream and similar toilet aids. It also contained a letter.

I sat down on the bed and read the letter by torchlight. It was dated a month ago and came from an address on Long Island. It read:

*My dear Dorry,*

*So glad to know you've been having such a lovely time in Paris. It was what you needed, dear, to get away from it all for a while, so make the most of it while the dollars last. Not too much of the flaming youth, though, if you'll take a word of advice from your old auntie. They tell me those Paris night spots are pretty torrid places.*

*I've got very good news for you, dear. You remember Dr. Max Edelmann of the Vallée des Fleurs, your father's friend who was so good to you when you were a little girl? Well, he's been released from a prison camp in Korea under an exchange of prisoners agreement and he's right here in New York. He would very much like to see you again and as he's sailing for Paris soon, I've given him your address. I'm sure he'd love to meet your French friends, the Rohans, so be sure you introduce him.*

*I can hear Skippy barking which means there's someone coming to the door, so all the best for now and have lots of fun. I'll write again soon.*

*Your loving Aunt Hilda.*

I stood up and the letter shook in my hands like a sail in the wind. 'Your French friends, the Rohans.' I had known from the beginning that the death of this girl had not been coincidence, that somehow she had been tied up with the Rohans, and now I had evidence to prove it, evidence that not even McKellar could reject.

I put the letter in my inside pocket, closed the suitcase and returned to the front room. At the same moment I heard a sound and switched off my flashlight. I cocked my ears. Yes, there was someone outside. I could hear the scuffle of feet on

the boardwalk and all at once my spine began to crawl. This was no chance intruder, wandering abroad. This was someone with a purpose and the purpose was connected with the chalet called 'Zurich'. The footsteps paused outside the door and I remembered that my gun had been stolen and that I was weaponless. I backed into the corner beside the table and stood waiting. The night was very still.

The door creaked, moved an inch and began slowly to open. A ray of moonlight silvered the threshold and across it there fell a shadow like a bar sinister. It was a man's shadow, there was no doubt of that, and for a moment it was as still as if painted on the floor. Then it moved—forward.

I got set to pounce. If the intruder had my gun I would have to strike first or everything would be ended here in the dusty darkness. I could hear my heart pounding like the beat of a ship's screw and as I tensed, my arm came in contact with the top of the table and knocked a small object off it. The object hit the floor with a sharp, rattling noise and rolled away over the bare boards. Instantly, the shadow was withdrawn.

I heard a rapid tattoo of receding footsteps on the board walk, bounded forward, became entangled with one of the canvas chairs and ended up floundering against the opposite wall. By the time I got to the door there was nothing to be seen but sea, sand and sky, the rows of chalets, silent as empty shrines, and the undulating dunes.

I played hide and seek around the chalets, then ran headlong into the dunes, but there was nothing. A cloud like a giant hand swallowed the moon and after a last look round, I retreated to the chalet. I had no wish to be a target for a hidden marksman and I was curious to discover the object I had dislodged from the table.

I found it resting against a chair-leg. It was a grey trouser button and, printed round its rim in chaste gilt lettering, was 'F.F. Paris'. In a flash I remembered the Fuseli Frères suit I had seen in Charles' wardrobe and my hand clenched over the button in a spasmodic gesture of triumph. Step by step I was building up my case and I was near now, so very near. The rope was half woven. I could feel the stillness in the room again, but it was no longer a tense and fearful stillness; it was peaceful and relaxed, like the hour after love. I pocketed the

button, pulled the door to behind me and left the scene. I walked directly back to the hotel, thinking hard. Had the shadow belonged to Charles and if so, why had he come to the chalet? To see if there was anything there that would connect him with the dead girl? That seemed the most likely explanation and if it was the true one, he had lost out by just a few minutes. I was a little worried, however, about taking possession of the evidence. I should have left it for McKellar to find and tipped him off what to look for, but if I had done that Charles might have gone back again and forestalled him.

When I was half-way up the stairs to my room, Betty Beamish came bounding after me. "There's a 'phone call for you, Mr. Howard," she said, with the air of one conveying dread tidings. "From Scotland Yard." I noticed the 'Mr. Howard'. I was no longer her love.

The caller was my Cousin George and from the rasp in his voice he was far from pleased with me. "What the hell are you playing at up there?" he demanded. To George any place north of London is 'up there'.

"Who told you I was up here? McKellar?"

"No, it wasn't McKellar, and if you see that big oaf, tell him we could bear to hear his voice occasionally. What are you trying to do to Charles Rohan?"

"Hang him," I said.

I could feel the silence building up at the other end of the line, then George said, as if he had difficulty in getting the words out: "If you don't mind your step, you're in big trouble. There's been a complaint about you from the French Embassy."

"A what?"

"You heard me."

"The gentle Heloise, I suppose," I murmured.

"What's that?"

"Nothing; I was thinking aloud. What do they accuse me of?"

"Persecution. We have to be very careful with foreign nationals, Anthony. They've got rights and the last thing we want is any trouble through diplomatic sources. So will you please pack your bags and get to hell out of there."

"I'm only a poor damn Britisher," I said, "but I've got

rights, too, and one of them is the right to reside where I like in these islands so long as I don't commit any crime or statutory offence. So here I bide, George, old son, until I'm ready to leave."

"All right," said George darkly. "All right. But just you put a foot wrong and we'll have you out before you can sing 'Rule Britannia'. You're walking a tight-rope; slip, and you get the works. Is that clear?"

"A well of English undefiled."

"A lot of good it does me to have a relative who annoys the citizens of a friendly power."

"You'll live it down, George. What's McKellar doing up here?"

"Taking the air, watching the golf and minding his own business."

"Forget I asked. One more question, though. Suppose one of your foreign nationals commits a serious crime while on British soil? Murder, for example."

"He'll get a fair trial in which he will be innocent until proved guilty."

"Good. Just apply the same principle to me, old son, and you can't go wrong."

I went thoughtfully up the stairs. What would George regard as putting a foot wrong? Breaking and entering? Stealing evidence? In my eagerness I had put both feet wrong already and now I dare not tell McKellar what I had done.

Lenore was still up and fully dressed. "Thank goodness you're back," she said. "I was afraid you'd been arrested."

"What for?"

"Breaking into that chalet."

I looked at her, startled. "Did you follow me?"

She shook her head. "I haven't left this room."

"Then how?"

"I know you, darling. Besides, I looked for those gloves to return them to Betty but they were gone."

I threw the gloves on the dressing-table. "Betty can have them any time. They've served their purpose."

"You found something?"

I nodded. "I have Charles in the hollow of my hand, only I can't quite close the fist yet." I showed her the letter and the button, and when I told her about the nervous intruder

she said: "It could have been Charles. Anthony, he went out. I saw him."

"When?"

"About fifteen minutes after you. I looked out of the window from time to time—it's a wife's privilege to be anxious, you know—and I saw him go. On leaving the gates he turned to the right."

"Towards the chalets?"

"Yes."

"He announces he is going to bed then sneaks out in the direction of the chalets! Did you see him come back?"

"No."

"Then wait a minute." I went along the corridor and listened outside Charles' door. I could hear breathing but it was not the deep, regular breathing of a man asleep. Charles was awake in there.

I returned to our bedroom. "He's back but he's still awake," I said. "Could be his conscience is troubling him."

"It does look as if it was Charles," said Lenore.

"It does indeed, but first I have to eliminate the others. They all knew this girl and I'm willing to bet not one of them would have identified her on the mortuary slab."

"Will you get into trouble for breaking into the chalet?"

"I didn't leave any fingerprints."

"That's not an answer."

"They'll throw the book at me, darling. It seems the Rohans have complained about me to the French Embassy and I've just had George on the 'phone, breathing threats."

"You should have left the chalet alone, but you're so impetuous when you're on a case, so infuriatingly single-minded."

"Perhaps I can nab Charles without having to produce this evidence."

"But if you need it to complete your case you'll produce it and hang the consequences?"

"I suppose so, Lenore, but I'll cross that bridge if and when. Meantime, let's go to bed."

. . . . .

On Sunday morning it rained and there was consternation

among the golfing fraternity. Some stood in groups, gazing disconsolately out of windows, some played cards or told sad stories of the death of kings, some clad themselves in waterproof armour and defied the driving rain. Among the last group was Charles.

The other Rohans were seated with Clare and Palliser in a compact little group in a corner of the lounge, and they greeted me with courtesy although not with cordiality. You would not have guessed that one of them had complained against me. Lenore was reminiscing in the office with Betty Beamish and I was, for the time being, on my own.

"Charles must have his practice though the skies should fall," Maurice was saying.

"They say it never rains on a golf course, don't they?" commented Dr. Palliser.

I found myself disliking Dr. Palliser although, as in the famous case of Dr. Fell, for no apparent reason. He had a trick of smiling insistently as he talked, although what he was saying was in no way humorous. I found it sinister. I sat beside him and tried to get him to talk about Clare, who was sitting on the opposite couch with Gilles and Heloise, out of earshot.

"Clare seems a most intelligent girl," I probed.

"In many ways, yes," he agreed, smiling that smile, "but in some respects she has not grown up. She lives in a world of her own, you know. The world of make-believe."

"Indeed. Why is that?"

"She was an only child and her parents neglected her a little, I think. The games she played as a little girl were very real to her, too real. Tomorrow she will not only be watching Charles play, she will be Charles. If he wins the Championship, she will be winning it, too."

"She should have gone on the stage."

"She wanted to very badly once, but she has got over that now. Her father drowned himself, you know."

"I didn't know that—why?"

"His world was make-believe, too. He could not cope with life."

"You're not afraid she might follow his example?"

He looked at me, smiling his meaningless smile. "I am not

afraid of anything, Mr. Howard. I am a fatalist. My motto is, 'Let it happen'."

I said nothing. He stood to gain by her death. His motto could be, 'Make it happen'.

"What does she do now?" I asked after a while.

"At the moment, nothing. She has had a variety of occupations—including a short spell of assisting Charles in his stage act -but has not stayed long in any of them. She has her own money, you see, and she would not take a job while she is so obsessed by Charles. He is her world."

"Is she his?"

"He is his own world. After the Championship she may bring him up to the scratch, but just now she comes a poor second. I thought she had him a month or two ago, then they seemed to become estranged for a little, but I never enquire into her affairs."

He turned his shoulder to me and picked up a Sunday paper. The subject bored him and he had nothing more to say. I badly wanted a few words with Heloise alone but it was difficult to separate her from the others without comment. I drifted away to the empty music-room and sat down at the piano.

I played Ravel's 'Daybreak' and a Tarantella by Rossini, and my thoughts grew with the music. The questions to ask; the steps to take; the dangers to avoid. I thought about the dead girl and the letter from her aunt: 'I've got very good news for you, my dear.' I thought about the confident statement by the woman on the beach: 'She didn't look happy.' And I thought about Dr. Max Edelmann of the Vallée des Fleurs.

I played part of the 'Emperor' Concerto but there was still no sign of Heloise so I switched to 'Clair de Lune'. That brought her. She was wearing an emerald suit this morning with a white nylon blouse. There was a diamond brooch at her neck and diamond drops in her ears and her mouth was very bright. She came and stood by the piano and I let my hands be still.

"Please continue," she urged. "You have such wonderful hands. I could watch them for ever. Those long fingers should always be on piano keys instead of in other peoples' pies."

"What did you say to your Embassy about me?" I asked.

"So. They have been in touch with you?"

"Scotland Yard has. They are not pleased with me a bit."

"Have they asked you to leave?"

"They cannot compel me to leave unless I offend against the law. Why are you so anxious for me to leave?"

"There are forces building up that may bring us to destruction, the innocent with the guilty. I feel it here." She pressed her hand against her heart and looked at me imploringly. "I feel you are the agent of these forces and I must warn you. If you strike at one of us, you strike at all."

"Innocent people have nothing to fear from me," I said gently, then I rapped out, "Why are you so worried about traitors?"

She went as white as her blouse and for a moment the lipstick on her mouth stood out like a vivid stain. She tried to stare me down, but I held her gaze until her eyes flickered and fell. "Perhaps it would help if I tell you," she said.

"I am sure that it would."

She walked with indolent grace to a chair, seated herself, crossed her legs, saw that I was not to be tempted and flicked down her skirt. "There are so many sad stories of the war," she said, "and mine is such a little one."

She fell silent but I neither moved nor spoke in case the spell should be broken. She heaved a sigh and gave a little, nervous shudder. "His name was Jacques," she said, and I had to strain to catch her words. "His surname doesn't matter, for he has long been dust. Dust. He was an undercover agent for the Maquis, as I was, and we made several missions together. He was handsome and very gentle, younger than his age and yet—not gay. He had a grave, tender smile and I loved him with all my being." She paused. "I am happy with Gilles. Very happy. But one does not love like that again." There were tears in her grey eyes. "You understand?"

"None better."

She rose and began to pace backwards and forwards in front of the piano, her hands clenching and unclenching. "Forgive me if I am agitated, but I do not like to tell this. You see, with me there is something even greater than the love of a woman for her man. I am a patriot. I love France. In the war my love for France transcended everything; even the great passion I had for Jacques. I know I am emotional and

unstable but I am older now. I do not know if I would have acted now as I did then and that tortures me. Time after time it comes to me in the night and tortures me. Gilles knows, I think, but he never speaks of it."

"Speaks of what?" I prompted.

"Forgive me, my friend. You are impatient. You must seek and seek until you know because you are made that way. I understand people; better now than then because of—but I will be short. I will not tantalize you with detail. Jacques was a traitor. The man I loved with my whole soul planned to betray us. I heard him speaking one day on the telephone and what I heard almost stopped my heart from beating. I listened in on an extension and heard all; the man he was talking with was of the Gestapo, and in a few seconds my world had crashed about my ears.

"But when he came to me, I was composed. I greeted him with a set smile; with the kiss of Judas. Monsieur, it was I who informed against him, I who gave evidence at his secret trial, I who was there when they took him out and shot him. I heard the shots. I ran out and threw myself upon his body. My life was over."

She leaned on the piano and her eyes were fierce on mine. "So now you know why I was upset at the mention of a traitor. It was natural. Yes?"

"Yes," I said.

"What I have told you is the truth."

"Yes."

"Do you believe it?"

"Yes."

"Then why——?"

"It is not the whole truth."

She paled at that. "Monsieur, I swear to you——"

"Save it," I said. "There is more behind. You hated telling me that story but you felt that you must, to keep me from probing further, to conceal from me an even uglier truth. In time of war one judges traitors with the heart rather than the head. You love France, but your Jacques may have loved her, too, after his fashion; may have thought he knew what was best for her. Try to think of him like that and it may bring you peace. The past is dead but which of you is contemplating treason in the living present? Not your husband, I am

convinced of that. And not you. Is it Charles? Or Maurice? Or Dr. Palliser? Or Clare?"

"Not Clare." The cry was wrung from her.

"Who, then?"

"No one. I tell you, no one. Why are you persecuting us? Who is paying you?"

"No one is paying me."

"But you ply for hire, do you not?"

"Not this time. I did not come here to look for a traitor but to prevent a murder. I was too late, but I may be in time to stop a second murder. The girl Charles saw in the mortuary was murdered and I am convinced that Charles knew her—I am convinced that you all knew her and that, if confronted with her body, you would all have denied her, as Charles did. You have closed your ranks. Why?"

She stood looking down at me, her bosom heaving, her face still pale and agitated. "I have no more to say to you," she said. "I think you are the devil himself," and with that she turned and almost ran from the room.

I sat on after she had gone, looking blankly at the piano keys. Then I began to play again, softly, insistently, Chopin's Etude in C Minor. "Any minute now," I thought. I was right, but Clare moved so quietly that I was not aware of her presence in the room until she was standing beside the piano. "What have you done to Heloise?" she demanded.

"Nothing."

"She has had an emotional storm and gone to her room in tears."

"She'll get over it." I resumed the Etude then had to draw my hands back quickly as Clare slammed down the lid of the piano.

"Stop it!" she exclaimed. "Sitting there like a damned great spider, spinning your web as you play. You willed me to come to you. I could feel it."

"Letting Charles control your mind has made you ultra-sensitive," I said. "Don't you have an emotional storm, too; be more original."

"What will you take to leave us alone?"

I looked up at her briefly. "Nothing that you can give."

"What can I do to show you I'm not in danger?"

"Put five hundred miles between yourself and Charles Rohan."

"I'm in no danger from Charles. I love Charles."

"You love Charles," I said angrily. "That's your creed. That's your world. You're living in a bubble, a beautiful, iridescent bubble and you're afraid I'll probe too far and burst your bubble so that you'll have to face reality. You're afraid of reality as your father was before you."

"Who's been talking about my father?"

"His successor."

She was silent, the fingers of one hand drumming on the piano-top, the red badge of anger burning on each pale cheek. "Listen," she said, "I admit something happened in Paris, something I don't want to talk about, but it won't happen again. I've taken steps to make sure of that."

"I know. You told the person responsible that he mustn't do it again and that you would not again allow yourself to be hypnotized."

"It was all a misunderstanding."

"You told him about me, too, and he came next evening to the Quai du Louvre, to see if I was there on watch. He was dressed in black and muffled to the eyes. Did you tell him I knew all about it?" She was silent. "You must have done," I went on, "because next day he tried to push me under a taxi."

"I know nothing about that."

"If he does get rid of me, how much longer do you think you'll have to live? I'm your insurance policy."

"You're wrong. I told you if you go on with this you may bring great unhappiness to someone, but of course you don't care about that. All you want is another successful case, kudos in the Press, a book about it at your publisher's and more money in your pocket, money made out of sorrow and heartbreak. You don't care whose life you ruin so long as you have your moment of triumph; another big success."

"Over all success there broods a sense of doom," I said.

"That's what I'm trying to tell you. And don't keep harping on about hypnotism. Any doctor will tell you that hypnotism has made a wonderful contribution to medical science, that there's nothing sinister about it at all."

"I know that, Clare. Used as Maurice uses it, it is a great

force for good, but when Charles uses it, he's the Prince of Darkness. Already a man has died in America because of it."

Her voice shook. "You—you know that?"

"I know more than you think."

She stepped away from the piano and held out her hands to me. They were shaking uncontrollably. "Look what you've done to me," she said piteously. "I'm a normal, healthy girl, happy with the man I love and I'm afraid of you. You say you want to help me and all you do is make me afraid."

"You're not afraid of me," I said. "You're afraid I'll burst that beautiful bubble. You're a psycho-neurotic and what you need most is the services of a good psychiatrist."

"What's a psycho-neurotic?"

"A sufferer from one of the behaviour disorders, such as hysteria, sex perversion, anxiety state, obsession—often traceable to abnormal conditions in early life. I don't know which particular neurosis is yours, but when I do, I've a notion I'll be awfully near the truth."

"I'm not a sexual pervert, anyway."

"No, I absolve you of that one. Don't tell me if you'd rather not, but are you and Charles lovers in the full meaning of the word?"

Her head came up and she looked at me with defiance. "What if we are?" she said. "It is no one's business but our [illegible]."

"Is that your only hold on him?"

"I have no hold on him."

"If it is, it's a tenuous one. Is he going to marry you?"

"I think so."

"Because you want to think so. Have you read Hassan?"

"[illegible]?"

" 'Gathered flowers are dead, Yasmin'."

She looked at me for a long moment in silence, then without another word, she turned and left the room.

## CHAPTER TEN

# THE GIMMICK

After lunch the weather cleared and the hotel emptied rapidly, but I stayed in, hoping for a telephone call from West or a visit from McKellar. Nothing happened, however. I played the piano a lot, but no inspiration came to guide my thoughts. After tea I urged Lenore to go for a walk and breathe in some fresh air, but she refused to leave me, so in the end I went too. We were out for not more than half an hour and no messages were received during our absence.

Dinner was a quiet meal and yet I was aware of mounting tension, of an explosive quality in the atmosphere. The Rohans were in and from time to time they would glance across at me as if to satisfy themselves that I was still sitting quietly in my place and not away somewhere working their ruin. They were not talking much tonight and their faces were grim.

During coffee, Lenore broke a silence that had lasted all through dessert. "Stop brooding, Anthony. You've found out a lot in a very short time but things just can't go on at such a pace. There has to be a breathing space and this is it."

"Clare insists that I'll only bring great unhappiness to someone, that all I'm interested in is my moment of triumph. Shall I drop it or go through with it?"

"That's a decision you must make alone," she said. "If you make it on soul and conscience it will probably be the right one."

"Why did you call her a hedonist?"

"I don't know. Instinct. A hedonist is one who lives for pleasure and I have a feeling that's Clare. Life must give her pleasure and only pleasure and at the moment she is getting her pleasure through her love for Charles. She couldn't bear to have her source of pleasure ended and if she says you will bring unhappiness to someone she probably means herself."

"I had thought of that," I said. "She's full of inhibitions."

"Which she releases through her love for Charles. There is a school of thought which holds that all pleasure is the

release of tension. The greater the inhibition the greater the tension and, therefore, the more pleasure at its release." She smiled at me. "Daddy's books again."

"Imperfectly digested, I suspect, but it's an interesting theory. I told her she was living in a bubble, insulated by it from the stern realities of life, and that she was afraid I'd burst the bubble by depriving her of Charles."

"A fool's Paradise. That's it exactly. But do you really think it possible that Charles could have induced her to drown herself by hypnotism?"

"I think she would have been easy. Her father drowned himself and at one time she contemplated suicide herself. All he would have to do would be to put her under, make her believe she was *l'Inconnue de la Seine* and leave the rest to her. The perfect murder."

"If he's tired of her, why does he have to murder her? It seems a bit drastic."

"Perhaps because he gets a kick out of it, because he's just plain bad. Or perhaps she knows something about him that wouldn't bear the light of day. So long as she thinks he loves her his secret is safe, but if he were to throw her over she would shout it to the housetops."

"And what about this other girl? The one in the mortuary?"

"I think she was more difficult than Clare. I think he had to be with her right to the end to see that she went through with it. Perhaps he had to push her over. I'm pretty sure it wasn't she who stuck the hatpin under the pier. I think the murderer did that."

"And the motive?"

"If she is the sister of the man who died in the car crash, she may have been going to revive that lawsuit, or she may be someone who knew his secret, too, the secret of that photograph, for instance: the thing he is being depended on to do."

"If they were on the pier together someone may have seen them."

"McKellar will be working on that angle but with the pier crowded with holidaymakers it will be difficult, if not impossible."

Lenore looked pensive, an expression which becomes her. "If only you knew how good a hypnotist Charles really is. All you've got is hearsay. You need a practical demonstration."

"It would be useful, but he doesn't do it in public nowadays."

"What about tonight's concert? He might be persuaded."

"I doubt it."

There was to be a concert after dinner in which a number of the hotel guests, including myself, had agreed to take part. I had not volunteered, as I always feel self-conscious in front of an audience, but I had succumbed to the blandishments of Betty Beamish, and now the time of my ordeal was nigh. Most of the dinner-tables had already been vacated and the audience sat expectant in the music-room under a haze of smoke.

There was a stencilled copy of the programme on each chair but the name of Charles Rohan was missing and Lenore looked disappointed. "He's not taking any chances," she commented.

We did not sit with the Rohans but with strangers near the front and when my turn came I played some popular stuff, like the 'Warsaw Concerto', which was rapturously received. There were sopranos, tenors, elocutionists, a humorous sketch by three golf professionals who would have done better to have stuck to golf and, on the whole, a good time was had by all.

Afterwards I had a drink at the bar with an ex-amateur golf champion I had once known slightly, then I went in search of Lenore. I found her sitting with the Rohans in the corner of the lounge they had made their own. They were being charming to her but some of the charm sounded forced when I sat down among them. They congratulated me on my performance, formally and without warmth, then the conversation seemed to die away.

It was Maurice who broke the silence. A book lay on his knees and he held it up to let me see the title. It was an early one of mine and it seemed he had come across it in the hotel library. "I am enjoying this, you know," he said. "I am enjoying it very much. You can create character and you have the gift of suspense, but I think I have guessed your murderer."

"Indeed?"

"Yes. That alibi, you know. It's too perfect, but I am interested to find out how you manage to break it."

"It's easy to manufacture a fictional alibi and then break

it," I said, seizing my chance, "but in real life it is not so easy."

"I suppose not."

"The only thing is that in real life a murderer seldom has a perfect alibi. It is not always easy to remember one's movements during a certain period—even a short time ago—unless one has special reason to."

"You think not?"

"No. Let's try an example. Suppose you were asked to detail your movements on a particular evening; let's say last Thursday; yes, last Thursday between 8 p.m. and midnight. Could you do so?"

He looked at me with a sardonic yet appreciative look in his eye then he said, "I let myself in for that one, did I not?"

"Just as an exercise in memory," I coaxed.

"As it happens, I can do it very easily. I sat in here reading after dinner till about nine o'clock then I went to my room for a little. About half past nine I went out for a walk and returned—soon after eleven, I think."

"Where did you walk to?"

"I explored the town of Fairlake, which was new to me."

"Did you go on the pier?"

"No, I kept to the landward side. Actually, I walked some distance beyond the limits of the town in a northerly direction."

Past the chalets, I thought. Aloud I said, "Did you meet anyone you knew?"

"Not till I reached the hotel gates when I encountered Gilles and Heloise."

I cocked a questioning eye at Heloise and she said quickly, too quickly, I thought, "Gilles and I went to the Floral Hall on the pier to listen to the music."

"The Floral Hall closes at ten," I pointed out.

"Afterwards we walked a little, along the promenade. It was a so beautiful evening."

"North or south?"

"South," interpolated Gilles, "and we saw nothing but loving couples of which there were many, until we met with Maurice at the hotel gates."

I looked at Charles. "You would be up at the golf course, I suppose?"

He nodded. "Yes, but not to play. I walked by myself along the edge of the course inspecting the lie of certain holes that interested me specially, then I walked down to the town and promenaded on the pier for a little."

"Alone?"

"Quite. When the pier closed I came off with the theatre crowd and walked a little more before turning in, but I was in bed before midnight."

"I was baby sitting," volunteered Clare, "for friends of mine who have a house just off the prom. The Patons of 21 Marchmont Road, if you must know. I stayed all night as they were at a party in Manchester, but I have no one to alibi me except the baby and she is a little young to be a good witness."

"You did not go out at all?"

"Of course not. What was the point of asking me to baby sit if I was going to go out?"

"You did not arrive at this hotel until eight on the following night?"

"No, I went back to Manchester on Friday morning after the Patons got home. I had some shopping to do and some friends to see. I'm not up north very often and I had not seen my friends for some time."

"She lunched with me in Manchester," said Dr. Palliser, smiling his silly little smile. "I can verify that."

"And where were you Thursday night?" I asked.

"In Manchester," said Palliser. "I did not leave my house all evening but read a book of science fiction stories and listened to the radio."

"Were you alone, too?"

"Unfortunately, yes. I was coming on here next day and had given my housekeeper her holidays."

"You have a car, of course?"

"Not a very good one."

"Well, you've all remembered very well," I said, "but if anyone connected with any of you had been murdered here on Thursday evening, none of you would have had an alibi."

"What a blessing no one was," said Charles mockingly.

"Gilles and I alibi each other," pointed out Heloise.

"You could have murdered in concert."

"Oh, I hadn't thought of that."

"I had," I said. I looked at her briefly and she dropped her eyes.

"Was that just to exercise our memories?" enquired Dr. Palliser, suavely, "or had you something in mind?"

"He had something in mind," Maurice answered for me. "But perhaps he will now put it out of his mind."

They were all looking at me but I smiled grimly and did not answer. The conversation died again. Maurice picked up his book. Charles looked out of the window. Dr. Palliser went to sleep. Gilles contemplated the ceiling. Clare appeared to lose herself in a Sunday newspaper. The lounge was almost empty now and our corner was completely isolated.

After a time Lenore said, "How quiet it is."

"Life is most dangerous when it is most tranquil," observed Heloise, and her eyes challenged mine.

Clare rustled her newspaper. "This paper is silly," she exclaimed. "It says there are no golfers today of the quality of the giants of the past like Taylor, Vardon and Braid."

"Braid!" exclaimed Lenore, seizing eagerly on the name. She looked quizzically at Palliser. "Wasn't there a Dr. Braid of Manchester who was rather famous? Something to do with hypnotism, I believe?"

I gave her a warning frown which she chose to ignore.

"There was indeed," confirmed Palliser. "He rescued hypnotism from quackery."

"It must be wonderful to be able to hypnotize a person," went on Lenore, in full cry. "To control someone's mind completely like Svengali did with Trilby, but I always think of hypnotism as one of the black arts."

"Which it is not," said Maurice tersely.

"Oh, I'm sorry. I forgot. You use it in your profession, don't you? I believe you've effected some amazing cures."

Maurice laid down his book. His interest was caught and his guard was down. "Cure is not quite the word," he said. "You can't cure an organic disease by hypnotism, but with disorders of the mind it is different, and in childbirth."

"Better than twilight sleep?"

"Much better."

"It is some gift you have? Or can anyone learn?"

"Not anyone, but most people could learn the technique, although the degree of skill is to some extent a gift. I don't

know where our family gets it but we seem to have it. Gilles can do it, too, although he will not, as a rule. I believe even Heloise tried it once, when a student, and caused rather a panic, but the real wonder is Charles. He has an amazing gift; not one in a million, in ten million, has his almost uncanny skill." His tone became acid. "It is a pity he chose to misapply it."

"I'd love to see a demonstration," said Lenore. "Could he hypnotize me?"

"Lenore," I whispered, "drop it." I could feel the tension again and all at once I was afraid. It was like the swift unsheathing of a sword in a quiet room.

Charles looked at me and a slow smile twisted his mouth. It was a smile of unadulterated wickedness.

"Easily," he said.

"Really? How do you do it? You couldn't just look at me and put me to sleep."

"Drop it, Lenore," I said again and again I went unheeded.

Charles had risen. He was looking down at Lenore and her eyes were riveted on his face. The seconds ticked away and no one spoke, then Charles said in a barely audible voice, "Dear lady, you *are* asleep."

I looked at Lenore. Her head was nodding. Her eyes had closed. She relaxed with a sigh in her chair and Charles' gleeful chuckle was the only sound in the room.

I felt my limbs begin to shake and mastered myself with an effort. I had to be calm, deadly calm, for Lenore's sake, if not for mine. I went over to her and touched her shoulder. "Lenore," I said, "wake up."

There was no response. She was breathing evenly and deeply, and her head slid sideways against the wing of her chair. "Darling," I implored, "wake up."

Her eyelids did not even flicker and when I shook her she lolled in the chair like a rag doll. Behind me Charles chuckled again and I turned to face him. "Wake her up," I ordered.

"You wake her up since you're so damned clever," he sneered.

"I can't do anything with her."

"Then let her sleep. A little extra sleep will not hurt anyone."

I took two steps towards him, moving delicately on the balls of my feet. I found it difficult to speak without choking, yet I was in the grip of a calm that was as icy as it was murderous. "Wake her up," I repeated.

He laughed in my face. "Wouldn't you just love to break my neck?" he jeered.

"No," I said, "I wouldn't. In view of the Championship tomorrow, I think it would meet the case if I were to break your little finger." I move in closer and added quietly, "I could do it so easily."

He flushed and then I saw his eyes dilate. They were boring into mine. The pupils seemed greatly enlarged and it took everything I had to tear my gaze from his. "And don't try the magic eye on me," I said, "or I'll blind you, too."

He got set to hit me then and I got set not to be hit. Then Heloise cried out: "Charles! Don't!"

We stood suspended in time, tensed to kill. "Wake her up," I said, "or you can kiss that Championship good-bye."

"Charles," pleaded Heloise. "*Pour moi*, Charles."

He looked at his hands and I saw him relax, saw the flush leave his face, the malice fade from his eyes. "For you, then," he said lightly to Heloise, and strode across to Lenore. He leaned over her, said something in a low voice, and her eyes opened. She stared at him, then at me.

"Have I been asleep?" she asked in a puzzled tone.

"You have," I said grimly. I looked at Charles. "But I have not been asleep, Rohan, as you will learn." I cupped my hand under Lenore's elbow and urged her gently but firmly from the room.

Upstairs in our bedroom she sat down on the bed, threw me a cigarette and took one herself. "What did happen?" she asked.

"You tempted him and he fell," I said.

"Good. You know now he can do it." She shuddered. "I can still see his eyes."

"If ever you do anything like that again," I warned, "I'll turn into an old-fashioned husband and spank you till it really hurts."

She smiled up at me. "I might like that."

"Shameless wench," I said, and pulled her up into my arms. "You had me scared that time. You really had."

. . . . .

Monday dawned clear for the start of the Championship, but there was a booming wind from the sea that blew clouds of sand across the promenade and would make low scoring difficult. There was an air of expectancy about the hotel this morning and when we went in for breakfast there was scarcely a competitor to be seen in the dining-room.

Immediately after breakfast West 'phoned, and I detected a note of excitement in his voice that had not been there before. The thing was getting him, too, and I knew he had something.

"Let's have it, West," I urged.

"The sister of the man who was killed in the car crash is called Dorothy Harding," recited West, "and she escaped with a broken left arm and minor injuries. She is twenty-two years old, five feet three inches tall and weighs around one hundred and fourteen pounds. She is of slim build with unusually small hands and feet. Red-gold hair, blue eyes, pink-and-white complexion, a short, straight nose, a mole on the left side of her neck. She gave no reason for withdrawing the suit against Charles Rohan except that she had changed her mind. That's all I've been able to get, sir. Is it enough?"

"Yes," I said, "it's enough." I remembered the mole. I had not noticed it particularly at the time, but I remembered it now.

"Anything else for me, sir?" West was eager, for a change.

"Yes. Who and where is Dr. Max Edelmann and what is the Vallée des Fleurs? He was lately released from Korea and may be in Paris. Someone called Hilda who lives on Long Island could help there. A moment and I'll give you her address." I read the address from the letter and West took it down. "O.K., sir. See what I can do."

I returned to Lenore, told her West's news and we drove down to the Town Hall. The clerk in charge of the chalets was a sympathetic-looking youth with pimples, and when I asked for a chalet he shook a mournful head. "I'm terribly sorry, sir, we haven't one for at least six weeks, and there's a big waiting list."

"Then how did Miss Harding get hers?"

"I beg your pardon, sir?" He looked flustered and a little frightened.

"You let one to an American girl called Dorothy Harding

who happens to be a friend of ours, and don't try to tell me she reserved it weeks ago because I won't believe you."

"Oh yes, Miss Harding," he said brightly, too brightly. "I remember."

"I bet you do. You let it to her out of turn, didn't you?"

"Well, you see, she wanted it so badly and she was so pretty and appealing and we happened to have a cancellation . . ." He floundered into silence.

"When did she get it?"

"She called last Wednesday. She had just arrived in Fairlake and couldn't get in anywhere. The Championship, you know. She has a way of looking at you, and, well—I guess I took pity on her."

"How long did she want it for?"

"Till the end of this week. Look here, sir, there's nothing wrong, I hope."

"You should read the papers," I said. "If you want to see her again you'll find her in the mortuary."

"Oh no!" His young face blanched. "Not the girl who was found drowned on the beach!"

"I'm afraid so."

"But she was so lovely."

"She isn't lovely now. The police want her identified so I'd go to the mortuary if I were you."

"You're not from the police then?"

"I'm working with them," I said untruthfully, and turned away. "Identification complete," I murmured in Lenore's ear as we left the building.

McKellar was waiting in the back seat of the Rolls with a face like the wrath of God. "Ye should lock your car when ye leave it," he said sourly.

"I will from now on," I promised. "To what do we owe the honour?"

He fumbled in his pocket and brought forth a tattered piece of paper. "We found the suicide note," he said. "At least, a Boy Scout did."

I took the note gingerly, noting the tear leading from the hole the hatpin had made. The paper was shiny and had been torn from a larger piece. On it was printed in black letters: '7. The Three Dragoons in a Military Sketch'.

"Part of a music-hall programme," I said.

"Brilliant," sneered McKellar. "The Fairlake Follies, to be exact. They have the Pier Theatre. Try the other side."

I turned the paper over and saw a scrawled line of writing. 'Anywhere, anywhere, out of the world.' It had been written in pencil and there was no signature.

"Good God!" I exclaimed. "The gimmick."

"The what?"

"The thing he used to start her off. The story of *l'Inconnue de la Seine* was all right for Clare in Paris. She seems to speak French fluently, but it wouldn't have done for this girl in England. She was no longer a virgin, remember, and this is from Thomas Hood's poem, 'The Bridge of Sighs', about a fallen woman who drowned herself."

"So I believe. Do ye ken any more of it?"

"So far as I remember, it begins:

'One more Unfortunate,
Weary of Breath,
Rashly importunate,
Gone to her death.
Take her up tenderly,
Lift her with care;
Fashioned so slenderly,
Young, and so fair!'

"There's a lot more of it I can't recall, then there's this verse:

'Mad from life's history,
Glad to death's mystery
Swift to be hurled:—
Anywhere, Anywhere
Out of the world.

'In she plunged boldly—'

and so on."

"It fits her like a glove," said McKellar.

"Doesn't it just! The cunning swine."

"Would he know Thomas Hood's poem?"

"It's well known. He taught English once at a Paris school and he had an English governess."

"The note is consistent with suicide. He'd had his fun with

her and thrown her over so she decides to make a hole in the water, like the girl in the poem. The poem was in her mind because it was just like her own case."

"You know damn' well it wasn't suicide."

McKellar was silent. His sphinx-like expression made it impossible to guess what he was thinking, then he said: "Not long before her death she had some sandwiches and coffee—and a small quantity of a sleeping drug. About half a tablet, the doctor thinks. Not enough to send her to sleep, but enough to make her drowsy."

"Enough to weaken her resistance to hypnotism."

"That's conceivable. She probably took it in the coffee."

"If she was at the theatre that night, someone may have seen them together and she may have visited the café at the interval."

"They serve coffee and sandwiches in the theatre itself, but we're working on it."

"She didn't stick that hatpin under the pier," I said. "The murderer did that on his way out. She'd have gone off the top."

"Ye never know what's in the mind of a suicide."

"Were her fingerprints on the hatpin?"

"I was waiting for that," said McKellar. "This will please ye. There were no prints on the hatpin of any kind. None at all."

"She wasn't wearing gloves?"

"She was not."

"Then that makes it murder. You must see that, Mac."

"I see it."

"So we've got him."

"We've a long way to go yet. Tell me this, are ye trying to build up a case against Charles Rohan because ye believe he's guilty or because ye hate his guts?"

"Both, and I can prove a connection between him and the dead girl. I've identified her for you, Mac, free of charge. She was Dorothy Harding, sister of an American who was killed in an accident through one of Charles' stage hypnotic tricks."

I paused for effect and McKellar said calmly, "I knew that yesterday."

I gaped at him. "You knew it?"

"Of course I knew it," he blazed. "What did ye think the police were for?"

"Persecuting motorists and small boys without rear lights on their bicycles. You must have been investigating Charles' past, too."

"Naturally."

"Why?" He didn't answer. "Let me ask you this, Mac," I pursued. "Is what you are doing up here likely to be of any help to me in what I'm doing?"

"Not necessarily."

"Let me put it the reverse way, then. Is what I'm doing likely to be of any help to you?"

"Otherwise ye wouldn't get doing it. There's been a complaint about ye from——"

"I know all about that. I had Cousin George on the 'phone and he wants you to call him."

"I called him last night. What did ye find in the chalet?" The question was slipped in so casually that it almost caught me with my guard down, but not quite.

"What chalet?" I asked, and felt Lenore stiffen at my side.

"She had one of the beach chalets and a man answering your description asked the people in the next chalet questions about it. Last night it was broken into and this morning I find ye coming out of the Town Hall Beach Lets Department."

"If I had broken into it I'd be a damn' fool to admit it."

"But it was you who asked about it?"

"Yes, and I've just been to enquire who had the let of it. She had."

"I've warned ye before——"

"Save it, Mac. I know what I'm doing."

"I wonder if ye do," he said. "Do ye remember in the *Angel of Light* murder, when I was building up a case against the lady who is now your wife and a warrant for her arrest had been issued, ye made an appeal to what ye called my integrity?"

"I remember."

"Ye asked me to say on soul and conscience if I was completely satisfied with the case against her and I had to admit that I wasn't."

"That's so."

"Now it's my turn to appeal to *your* integrity. Are ye completely satisfied that Charles Rohan murdered Dorothy Harding?"

I was silent, thinking bitterly. Then, "No," I admitted.

"Why not?"

"I don't know. There's something niggling at the back of my mind but I can't get it clear. He's such an obvious suspect but I once told Clare Thorne that I never believe the obvious."

"If only we could get Clare Thorne to talk," he said.

"She won't talk. She's madly in love with him. Why did you ask me that question?"

"Because I don't want ye to forget the others."

"Don't worry," I said. "I won't forget the others."

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

# THE PARCEL

WE SAT in silence for a few moments, watching the traffic flow past. Then McKellar said, "The inquest's this afternoon; are ye coming?"

"No," said Lenore quickly.

McKellar cocked a quizzical eye at me and I shook my head. "You heard what the boss said, Mac. She thinks it will upset me. You'll be adjourning it, of course?"

"Aye, just so. Formal evidence, then adjournment."

"If it's of any interest to you, I can give you the alleged movements of everybody in the case on the night Dorothy Harding died." I told him all I had gleaned and when I finished there was a look of grudging admiration on his face.

"How did ye get all that?" he asked.

"There is a tide," I said. "I took it at the flood."

"Well, we'll do what we can to check it in a quiet way." He stepped out of the car and closed the door.

I leaned out of the window. "By the way, we met Sergeant Flowerdew."

"Indeed." The inspector's tone was elaborately disinterested.

"Yes; he thought the same about you, too. Well, whatever it is, good hunting to both of you." I let in the clutch and the Rolls glided away.

We headed for the golf course and Lenore said, "He let you off very lightly over the chalet."

"So you noticed that, too. He can't prove it was me, of course, but it looks as if he's letting me have my head."

"Why?"

"Because he wants Charles Rohan so badly that he's prepared to put up with amateur interference for once."

"He doesn't seem to think Charles committed the murder."

"He just wants to be sure. Sure and steadfast, that's McKellar."

With the raising of the curtain on the Open Golf Cham-

pionship, the atmosphere at the course fairly crackled with excitement. Today a five-shilling fee was being charged for admission and five shillings extra for the car park, yet the car park was well filled, and a crowd numbering several thousands swarmed over the course. Police patrols were out, making strenuous efforts to prevent cunning motorists from leaving their cars outside private houses to escape the parking charge and a great game of hide and seek was going on up and down the lanes and side roads adjacent to the course.

Marquees had mushroomed overnight; already people were queueing for refreshments and the Golf Traders' Exhibition was proving a popular side-show. A massive black scoreboard had been set up near the clubhouse, bearing the name of each competitor in alphabetical order and white lettering, with blank squares in which individual scores could be chalked up, round by round. Already the early returns were coming in, and there was a rush to surround the board as the man with the chalk appeared. I noted that the best score was seventy-five and that there was still a blank opposite Rohan's name. He had been a fairly early starter, however, and by now must be well round the course.

"They play one qualifying round today and one tomorrow," I told Lenore, "and the qualifiers begin the Championship proper on Wednesday."

"It's all stroke play, isn't it?" she asked.

"Yes, the qualifying scores are wiped out and thereafter they play four more rounds. The man with the lowest aggregate will be Open Golf Champion for the current year."

"Does he win much money?"

"Not a great sum from the Championship itself, but the prestige brings him in plenty in exhibition fees, etc. It's worth winning all right."

We watched a number of competitors drive off from the first tee, then followed Henry Cotton and his partner for a few holes. Cotton was a joy to watch, and seemed to find the wind less troublesome than some of the others. The holiday crowds were good-humoured and did their best to obey the directions of the army of white-coated stewards. There was a sprinkling of Press scouts with walkie-talkie radios and here and there I noticed the flat, diced caps of the County Police.

At the fourth tee we spotted Charles coming in. He was

wearing his white sweater and black slacks again and a happy, excited gallery panted at his heels. We crossed over to wait for him and saw him play his second to the sixteenth green. It was a perfect picture of a number four iron shot. I saw a feather of turf fly up, lost sight of the ball in flight, and jumped nervously as it landed with a thud about three yards past the pin. It spun backwards as if jerked by a string and finished about four feet from the hole. There was a rattle of applause and the crowd raced for vantage points round the green.

The stewards busied themselves with their rope barrier, a dog was hurriedly chased from the scene, a too eager spectator with a camera was frowned into retreat and Charles and his partner stepped over the ropes, followed by their caddies, markers and Clare Thorne. Clare took up a position just short of the green but inside the ropes, seated herself calmly on her shooting-stick and folded her arms. Her face was expressionless, but her pose revealed her awareness of the fact that she was a privileged spectator.

The other man, a drab figure in grey, putted first, missed and almost missed the return putt. Then Charles squared up to his putt. He did not study it intensively as I had seen him do in practice, but putted quickly and missed. The crowd groaned, Charles smiled grimly and tapped the ball in for four. With a little more care he might have had a 'birdie' three but it did not seem to be worrying him. "He must have a stroke or two in hand," I said, "and will be quite content so long as he qualifies. He isn't going to spend himself till the Championship proper."

We followed him in the last two holes, which he did in effortless fours. I noticed that he and his villainous-looking caddie seemed to be completely *en rapport*. No signs passed between them, but Absalom seemed able to produce the right club at the right time. He had intelligent dark eyes, but they had a cunning look, too.

We crossed over to the score-board and saw seventy-three go up opposite Charles' name. "Fair enough," I commented.

"This is fun," said Lenore. "Could we have lunch here and see some more in the afternoon?"

We had a snack lunch in one of the refreshment tents and a drink in another then went out again on to the course. By half past three, however, I had had enough of it. My mind

was too restless and I could not concentrate on watching the golf for thinking about the case against Charles Rohan. It had seemed almost watertight and yet -I wanted to get it all down on paper, to study it in detail—and at last I suggested to Lenore that she should stay on till she was tired and I would go back to the hotel and work. "I'll leave you the car," I said, "and walk down. It isn't very far."

"All right, darling, but take care of yourself."

I don't remember the walk back to the hotel for my mind was busy all the way, but I got there all right. There was nothing in the letter rack and there had been no messages. Everyone was at the golf course and the hotel had a forlorn and deserted air. Even Betty Beamish was not to be

I locked myself in our bedroom, took out my notebook and wrote it all down in chronological order; the meeting with Clare on the Quai du Louvre; the man in black; the attempt on my life; the discovery of Charles Rohan, his sinister skill in hypnotism and the fact that he had had every opportunity to hypnotize Clare in Paris; the finding of the body of Dorothy Harding and his denial of her although he must have recognized her at a glance. That was the damning thing, I thought. That was what, more than anything else, pinpointed him as chief suspect and yet, if challenged, he would have his answer ready. Yes, he had recognized her, but did not want to be mixed up in inquest proceedings during the Championship. He wished to be free to concentrate on winning, for it was his great ambition to win the Championship for France. He had had nothing to do with her death, etc., etc. But then there was the Fuseli Frères suit in his wardrobe and the button lettered 'F.F. Paris' that I had found in Dorothy's chalet. He had no alibi for the time of her death and on his own admission he had been on the pier that night. He had been out of the hotel, too, during the time when the nervous intruder had tried to enter the chalet.

I put down the facts of Dorothy Harding's death; the hatpin that bore no fingerprints; the suicide note with its theatrical wording; the sleeping drug that would have stupefied her will; the evidence in her aunt's letter that she knew the Rohans; the fact that she had been prepared to sue Charles for damages following her brother's death and then had

mysteriously withdrawn the suit. Why? Because he had induced her to fall in love with him and then wantonly destroyed her?

He was a man of ruthless character, he had given ample evidence of that. He would let nothing stand in his way. He was for Charles Rohan first, foremost, and all the time and there was malice in him. He was a bad enemy.

I put it all down and studied it till my head was buzzing then, angry and dissatisfied, I locked the notebook in my suitcase and went out into the sunlight. The wind had less bite now but it was still breezy and white horses rode the mud-coloured sea. I walked to the Public Library, took out the *Oxford Book of English Verse* and read Thomas Hood's 'Bridge of Sighs' right through. It left me more depressed than ever and I was just leaving the library in disgust when I saw Absalom.

He was walking away from me on the opposite side of the street and something about his manner drew my immediate attention. He had a furtive air, an over-the-shoulder look and, keeping on my own side of the road, I began to follow him. Several times I saw him glance anxiously behind and then he paused, looked swiftly up and down the street and darted through the swing doors of an adjacent pub. The pub was a typically English structure of red brick with bottle-glass, bow windows. It was called the Acre of Corn and, after giving Absalom a minute to settle, I followed him in.

It was just after opening time and the pub had few patrons. There were one or two lounging at the bar counter and half a dozen more seated at small round tables in the nicely furnished lounge. It was a superior pub because Fairlake was a superior resort. Absalom was at one of the tables, hiding behind a newspaper in which he was so completely immersed that I was certain he could not read a word of it. He popped his head up as I entered, gave me a suspicious look, decided that I was harmless and drew down his head again like a tortoise going into its shell. He had discarded his scarlet fez for a battered soft hat and his dark European suit was shapeless and too long for him. A shabby Othello bent on mischief?

A white-coated waiter approached and, remembering that Absalom was a deaf mute, I wondered how he would make himself understood. He did so quite simply by picking up the

price list from the table and pointing to an item on it. He knew enough English for that, anyway, I thought.

The waiter nodded, came over to me, took my order for a gin and tonic and drifted away to the bar. He was away some time but Absalom never raised his eyes from his paper. Then, at last, the waiter reappeared with my drink and a sherry for Absalom. If the caddie was a Mohammedan, he was not a very good one.

The place began to fill up and each time someone entered, Absalom looked up expectantly. I sipped my gin and tonic, lit a cigarette and waited. In about ten minutes a little man in a shiny blue serge suit and a grey tweed cap entered, looked about him suspiciously and made a bee-line for Absalom's table. He was carrying an oblong parcel done up in brown paper and tied with green tape and, placing the parcel on the table beside him, he pulled a crumpled newspaper from his pocket and began to read. Absalom never stirred.

The waiter brought the little man a beer, the little man let his ferrety eyes rove round the room and, apparently satisfied that he was unobserved, gave the parcel a jog with his elbow, sliding it closer to Absalom. Absalom took no notice and after a few minutes the little man gave the parcel another push. It now lay on the table about half-way between the two men and I studied it with interest. It was the shape and about the size of a box of a dozen golf balls and in a town where golf was the main topic of conversation it might well contain just that.

The little man leaned forward to drink his beer, jogged the parcel a third time and it skidded close to Absalom's elbow. Five more minutes passed, the little man finished his drink, folded his paper, stood up unhurriedly, and walked out of the pub—without his parcel. Not a single look had passed between them but the parcel was now beside Absalom and Absalom's hand was resting firmly upon it.

Soon afterwards, Absalom rose to leave. I followed a few seconds behind him, but when I reached the street I was just in time to see him jump on a passing bus, the parcel under his arm. There was nothing for it but to return to the hotel where I found Lenore awaiting me.

She had spent a happy afternoon chasing up and down after different players but seemed to have derived the greatest

satisfaction from watching the crowds. She had been greatly intrigued by the attire of some of the female spectators and babbled of green slacks, heavenly twin sets and expensive tweed skirts.

When she had run down a little I told her about Absalom. "What do you think he could be up to?" she asked.

"Haven't a clue. It looked like a shoddy little transaction in stolen golf balls and may have nothing to do with the main issue at all. If he hadn't worn such a conspiratorial air I wouldn't have paid any attention to him."

"He would hardly be stealing golf balls for Charles."

"No. Charles will get all the balls he needs from the makers for nothing. I believe that's quite a racket in professional golfing circles."

"Perhaps Absalom is just doing a little business for himself on the side."

"Probably. He looks capable of any villainy from receiving stolen property to throat slitting."

I dismissed Absalom from my mind and we went in to get ready for dinner. Afterwards, at Lenore's suggestion, I took the Rolls out again and we drove up to the course to have a look at the score-board. Play was over for the day and the crowds had dwindled to a few dozen enthusiasts clustered round the board. No one had broken seventy and Charles was nicely placed somewhere in the first dozen. I noticed that several very well-known players had failed to distinguish themselves and would have to produce their best form next day to qualify.

When we returned to the hotel I parked the Rolls in one of the marked-off spaces near the gates, and we were just about to enter by the front door when Lenore halted. "Damn!" she exclaimed. "I've left my magazine in the car. Give me the key, darling."

I complied and stood in the flagged courtyard in front of the entrance, watching her walk across to the Rolls and thinking how graceful and slim she was and how beautifully she carried herself. The Rolls became her perfectly and I was glad I had yielded to temptation and bought it. I had a soft spot for the Rolls because it was a symbol of a life that is gone, a symbol of the lost generation whose youth had been

spent in the war. The lost generation is my generation and I am not ashamed of it.

Lenore found her magazine, locked up the car again and turned towards me. She came back smiling, then, half-way across the courtyard the smile was wiped from her face and terror took its place. "Look out, Anthony!" she screamed. "Raaa!"

I jumped forward, instinctively, and at the same moment there was a terrifying crash close behind me. I whipped round, feeling my heart begin to pound madly in my body. A heavy leather golf bag, full of clubs, lay across the flagstones, two of which had been shattered by its impact. I looked up. On the second floor of the hotel, directly above, a casement window gaped wide.

Lenore threw herself, shuddering, against me and I put my arms round her. "Darling, are you all right?"

"Yes," I assured her. "Thanks to you."

"I saw it falling from up there." She pointed up at the open window. "If you hadn't moved it would have killed you."

"Instantly," I agreed. "Did you see anyone at the window?"

"No, I just saw the thing hurtling through the air and screamed like a madwoman. I shouldn't have stayed up at the course this afternoon, but I didn't think you'd be in any danger in daylight while there were people about."

At that moment a man came in through the gates, uttered an exclamation, and ran across to us. "What the hell's going on here?" he demanded. "These are my clubs."

He was a professional called Hickman from somewhere in the Midlands. "You should take better care of them then," I said. "Someone just tossed them out of that window and missed my head by inches."

"What!" He went down on his knees beside the bag and pulled out an iron club. The shaft was bent and twisted. "I'll kill the bastard that done this," he raved, and then he saw Lenore. "Sorry, lady," he apologized and made a dash for the hotel. We followed him in and up the stairs to his room. The door was wide open and he paused on the threshold, a bewildered look on his face. "Who would do a thing like that? I'm not all that good."

"You think one of your rivals may have thrown them out

the window to spoil your chances of winning the Championship?" I asked.

"I haven't got much chance of winning the Championship; that's why I can't understand it. I didn't think I had an enemy in the world."

"Did you leave your room door open?"

"I must have done. I'm always leaving doors open. Born in a stable, my wife tells me."

"It looks as if someone passing along the corridor saw the open door, glanced in, noticed the clubs and heaved them out the window. You can't think of anyone at all who might have a grudge against you?"

"No one in the wide world." His eyes narrowed suddenly. "They tell me you're a private 'tec. Are you on a case here?"

"Could be."

"Suppose the bloke you're after saw you standing down there, saw my clubs in passing and tried to bean you with them?"

"That's what I think," I said.

Hickman's face cleared. "If it was that I'd feel a whole lot easier. I can get new clubs in time for tomorrow, but it would take all the guts out of me if I thought someone did this to me just because I was me, if you understand."

"I think you can ease your mind of that," I said. "I was the target all right. Where did you keep the clubs?"

"Leaning against the wall beside the window. I should have left them up at the clubhouse but they were new and I wanted them where I could keep an eye on them. Wish I had left them there now."

I leaned out of the window and looked down. The clubs still lay across the flagstones and I had a sudden horrible vision of my body lying there in its own blood, a stricken Lenore bending over it. I drew in my head again quickly. "Was the window open, too?" I asked.

"Yes. I'm a fresh air man." He stooped to pick up a towel that lay on the floor between the window and the wash-basin. "Whoever did it must have knocked this down. I left it hanging on the towel rail." He clutched my arm. "What about fingerprints on the bag?"

"Not a chance," I said. "I'm dealing with someone who's

terribly careful about fingerprints—too careful. He handled the bag through the towel."

"Fingerprints on the towel, then?"

I shook my head. "Too rough. You'd better 'phone the police."

Hickman shook his head quickly. "I got no use for policemen," he said. "My brother-in-law's one and I hate his guts. If this is someone you're after, keep after him. I'm willing to leave it to you."

"I'll do what I can," I promised, "but I don't suppose there would be any witnesses, you know."

"I expect you'll know what to do. I'll just go down and get my clubs. Some of them may be O.K."

After he had gone Lenore and I had a look round his room but there was no clue. Then I sent Lenore back to our bedroom and went along the corridor to Charles Rohan's room. I could hear him moving about inside and when I knocked he opened the door immediately.

"Well?" he asked, making no move to invite me in. His manner was wary but he seemed prepared to listen.

"How long have you been in?" I asked.

"Half an hour or so. Why?"

"A few minutes ago a bag of golf clubs was thrown out of the window of a room along the corridor."

"What for?"

"I happened to be standing underneath."

"No concern of mine," he said, and made to close the door. I put my foot in the opening.

"Not so fast," I said. "Do you know anything about it?"

"Nothing. Whose room was it?"

"Sam Hickman's."

"He is—small potatoes. I would not be interested in destroying his clubs nor the clubs of any of my competitors. I do not need to descend to such tricks. Nor do I rate you such a nuisance as to commit murder. Also, how could I have known you were standing beneath Hickman's window? My room faces the other way."

"You might have seen me from the window of one of the lavatories or from a corridor window."

"I have not been to a lavatory since I came in and I do not make a habit of peering through corridor windows."

"Is the rest of your party in?"

"Yes, we all came in together but may I point out that all our rooms face the opposite way?"

"They would," I said bitterly. "By the way, on Saturday night you announced you were going to bed, then you went out instead. Why?"

"I thought a short walk would help me to sleep. I understand there is no law against it." He banged the door against my foot. "Please," he said imperiously, and I withdrew my foot. The next second I was facing a closed door. I turned away and, half-way along the corridor, met Clare walking quickly towards me. She would have passed with scarcely a glance but I stepped in front of her, forcing her to halt. "How badly do you want to be rid of me?" I asked.

"As badly as I ever wanted anything."

"Badly enough to try to kill me?"

Her eyes widened. "Of course not."

"It just struck me," I said. "Someone's been trying."

She shook her head. "Not guilty. How did someone try?"

"A bag of golf clubs was dropped from a front window beneath which I was standing."

"Good gracious! But that might have been spite or rivalry between golfers. I mean, it could have been coincidence that you were standing underneath."

"It could, but all my instincts tell me it wasn't. The clubs don't belong to a player with an outstanding chance of winning the Championship."

"Well, I never was much good at weight lifting."

"A bag of golf clubs isn't all that heavy. This one was beside the window and the window has a low sill."

"I wouldn't do anything so silly, Mr. Howard. Or so wicked, and my room doesn't face the front so I couldn't have seen you."

"You might have seen me from a corridor window or from the lavatory."

"Where do you think I'm going now?"

"The lavatory," I pointed out, "is in the other direction."

"Not the one I patronize. It's further, but it's cleaner."

I stepped aside. "Don't let me detain you, then."

I heard her walk all the way to the end of the corridor, then a door closed and a bolt snapped. She may or may not

have been intending to go to the lavatory but she had gone now all right. It was possible she had been making for Charles' room and had changed her mind when she saw me.

I stood hesitating in the middle of the corridor then turned back towards my own room. What was the use of questioning the rest of them? I would only get the same answer. Nobody was going to admit having tried to brain me with a bag of golf clubs unless he was mad.

Lenore, who was seated at the dressing-table, looked up with relief as I entered and clung to me tightly when I kissed her. "Someone's scared," I commented.

"I know," she said. "Me."

I sat down on the bed and began to whistle thoughtfully. "You look very happy all of a sudden," said Lenore, watching me in the mirror. "Half an hour ago you were as miserable as I've ever seen you, now, just because someone tries to take your life, you're delighted."

"It's nice to have proof I'm on the right track," I said. "I know now that I didn't dream this case up, that I'm up against a very cunning and quick-thinking murderer."

"A foeman worthy of your steel?"

"That's it. He—or it could have been she, but we'll stick to he—saw me standing in the courtyard, happened to walk along the second floor corridor immediately afterwards, peeked in through the open door of Hickman's room—the way most people do in hotel corridors when bedroom doors are left open—saw the golf clubs beside the window and immediately thought I might be within range. He entered the room, reconnoitred from the window, saw that I was indeed just underneath, threw the golf clubs out and made himself scarce. The plan was conceived and carried out all within a few seconds and it came within an ace of succeeding. I call it a pretty stout effort."

"And I call it a strange way of cheering you up. I take it there will be no further talk of our leaving here? Of giving up?"

"No, Lenore," I said gently. "Not now. I'm in to the death."

## CHAPTER TWELVE

# CONQUEST OF CLARE

TUESDAY came and went without incident. Charles added a seventy-two to his seventy-three of the previous day, which enabled him to qualify with ease. Most of the fancied aspirants were well placed, but many challengers had fallen by the wayside. Many who had come with high hopes would be going home by the first available train, and the evening and the morning were the second day.

Wednesday was a perfect day for the start of the Championship proper and the course swarmed with enthusiasts. The sun shone his brightest, there was scarcely enough breeze to ruffle the tall grass of the 'tiger country' and Charles opened with a 'birdie' three. I watched him drive off from the second tee, then made my way back to the hotel to search his room again.

Lenore kept watch while I opened the wardrobe door and took out his Fuseli Frères suit. All the buttons were intact and a lighter shade of grey than the button I had found in the chalet. "Damn!" I said, and sat down on the bed.

"You look like a bloodhound that's suddenly lost a strong scent," said Lenore from the doorway. "What's the matter?"

I told her.

"Could he have had them all replaced?" she asked.

"With a different shade of grey?"

"He may not have had one the same shade so they all had to be changed."

"It's hardly likely he'd have had a full set of spare buttons with him."

"What about the trousers he's wearing?"

"They're black."

"So they are. Sorry."

I put the suit back and began to go through the drawers of the dressing-table. The second drawer was locked. "That's funny," I said. "None of the drawers was locked last time."

"Can you do anything about it?"

"I think so. I have a handy little gadget on my key-ring

which should be just the thing for a simple lock like this one. All the best 'private eyes' have them."

The gadget worked beautifully and I slid the drawer open. It held shirts and nylon underwear and beneath one of the shirts was a suspicious bulge. I lifted the shirt out and there, at the bottom of the drawer, was the parcel I had seen so stealthily transferred to Absalom in the lounge of the Acre of Corn. I remembered the green tape. "Ah!" I exclaimed.

Lenore forgot her duties as watchdog while I undid the tape and unwrapped the stiff brown paper. Then her face fell. "What an anticlimax," she lamented.

The parcel appeared to contain what I had suspected when I first saw it, a box of a dozen golf balls. They were of well-known make, American size, and each one was wrapped in blue, crinkly paper with the name of the make on a small, gummed-on label. "A present from Absalom?" I wondered aloud.

"Surely Charles is above resetting stolen golf balls," doubted Lenore.

"He might not have known they were stolen."

"Then why did he lock the drawer and take the key? The keys of all the other drawers are there."

I rummaged in the drawer again and brought out his passport. "Perhaps because of this," I said, studying the passport photograph. After the manner of passport photographs, it was not a brilliant likeness but it was Charles all right.

I put the passport back, retied the parcel, replaced it and made all secure. Then I scrutinized the room to make sure I had left no traces. "Let's go," I said at last. "There's nothing here."

"What are you going to do now?"

"Search the rooms of the rest of them," I said grimly.

Lenore obtained a master key from Betty Beamish and kept watch again while I went systematically through the rooms of all the other members of the Rohan party. I found nothing; no trousers lacking a button; no clue or pointer of any kind. Baffled, we retired to our own room and I read through my notes of the case against Charles. I tried to study them dispassionately, to clear my mind of any feeling of bias and when I had finished I threw the notebook across to Lenore.

"There's the edifice I've built up," I said. "Now tear it down."

Lenore read in silence then, at last, she raised her head. "It looks pretty solid to me, darling."

"It isn't, you know," I said bitterly. "It isn't solid at all. There's a flaw that tears a hole in it a mile wide. Two flaws, in fact."

"What are they?"

"He would have made sure that her fingerprints were on the hatpin. He wouldn't have been so damned stupid as to wipe the knob and leave no prints at all. That cries to high heaven that the thing was murder."

"He might have been flustered. It can't be easy to commit murder with a cool and detached mind, to take care of every little detail. What's the second flaw?"

"The sleeping drug. He wouldn't have needed any help from a sleeping drug, judging from his stage record and his performance with you."

"Perhaps she was a difficult subject."

"She might have been but, after all, her brother wasn't. He was too much the other way and she's the same flesh and blood."

"It doesn't follow that she'd be easy, too, and if he was trying to make her drown herself he'd use every precaution to see that she obeyed orders."

"You may be right," I said, "but if it came to trial, a clever defence counsel would make the most of these two points. I need something else; something that will clinch it. It's high time I was hearing from West."

West remained silent, however, and by dinner-time there was nothing new. McKellar was keeping very quiet, too, I thought, and wondered if there was any significance in that.

The Rohan contingent trooped in to dinner in a state of jubilation. Charles had played magnificently and at the end of the long day's play his score of sixty-eight had not been equalled. There were two sixty-nines and a crop of seventies but, so far as the Rohans were concerned, there was only one man in the Championship.

West 'phoned at midnight, just as I was stepping into bed. "Some odds and ends of information, sir," he reported. "There isn't much but I thought you'd better have it."

"Shoot."

"First, that cocktail party at Maurice Rohan's. The guests were Charles and Gilles Rohan, Mrs. Gilles Rohan, Clare Thorne, Dr. Palliser, who's her stepfather, and—Dorothy Harding."

"Yes," I exulted. "I thought she might have been there. Was the party amicable?"

"It seems to have been. Our man in Paris has been in touch with Maurice Rohan's manservant and from all accounts it was quite a party, a large quantity of spirituous liquor being consumed in a relatively short time."

"I've noticed they can all swill it down," I said. "Do you know who left the party first?"

"Yes. Clare Thorne and Dr. Palliser left together. They were staying at the Hôtel Beauvallet. Then Dorothy Harding left, alone. She was at the Hôtel des Etrangers. The others were all staying with Maurice."

"Were there any hypnotic tricks at the party?"

"Funny you should ask that, sir. I was just going to tell you. It seems the party got a bit uproarious and somebody hypnotized the two girls, Clare and Dorothy; made them put on servants' aprons and serve drinks to the others."

"Who did the hypnotizing?"

"Our man didn't get that."

"Tell him to try and find out."

"Yes, sir. You asked for some dope on Dr. Palliser, but I haven't been able to get much. He married Clare's mother five years ago and she died two years later. He's a scientist. Did some work on atomic research for a while then took a post at Manchester University. His hobby seems to be conjuring, and he's a member of the Company of Magic. That's a society composed of conjurers, illusionists, amateur hypnotists and the like."

"The devil it is," I said. "That's interesting, West."

"I haven't been able to get much about Clare herself. She seems to have been a bit of a rolling stone, but I'm still working on it. Then you wanted to know about Dr. Max Edelmann. He's a Swiss doctor—a T.B. specialist—and for some years he was Resident Medical Superintendent at a T.B. sanatorium in Switzerland, near Lausanne. That's the Vallée des Fleurs. Then he went out to Korea, following stories about an alarming

spread of T.B. among the South Koreans, and was taken prisoner by the Chinese. He was released a short time ago and arrived in Paris about the middle of last week. He's staying at the Crillon."

"Anything yet about that liner?"

"Not yet, sir. The trouble is we've found several liners with names ending in ND and we're getting the passenger lists checked as quickly as we can. But it might be a long job."

"Well, carry on, West, and thanks for all you've done so far."

I got into bed thinking about Dr. Palliser. He had a motive as regards Clare and had left the cocktail party along with her. He was a member of a society that included hypnotists and might well be able to practice hypnotism himself. He habitually wore dark glasses and the man in black had worn dark glasses. He was not tall, very little taller than his stepdaughter, in fact, and the man in black had not given me the impression of height, although, as he had been on a higher level, his height had been difficult to judge. Palliser had claimed to have been in Manchester on Thursday evening, but he had admitted having a car and could have driven to Fairlake in not much more than an hour. I could not fit him with a motive against Dorothy Harding but he was decidedly worth investigating and I decided to put it up to McKellar.

At breakfast next morning I noted that both Gilles and Maurice were wearing the grey gaberdine suits they had worn on the previous day, but while Gilles' looked as if it had been slept in, Maurice's looked as if it had just come from the tailor. It was possible, even probable, that all three brothers patronized the same tailor. Charles had a late start that day and after breakfast I cornered Clare alone in the rose garden behind the hotel.

She was not looking well this morning. Her face was peaky in spite of the wine-like air and her eyes, dark-circled, seemed to have shrunk into her head. She looked as if she had aged ten years in a night and I wondered just how old she really was. She was wearing tan slacks and a navy blue silk blouse and, when she saw me, fear lurked in her eyes as a fugitive behind a curtain. "Aren't the roses lovely!" she exclaimed, trying desperately to establish the conversation at a safe level.

"Yes," I said. "Clare, you and I are going to have a showdown." I took her by the arm, led her firmly to a seat and made her sit down. I seated myself beside her and offered her a cigarette.

She took it with a listless air, smoked for a few moments in silence then said piteously, "Why won't you leave me alone?"

"Because things have gone too far for that. How well do you know Dorothy Harding?"

"Dorothy Harding!" She jerked up her head in that surprised way she had and the cigarette dropped from her fingers to the ground. She stooped mechanically and picked it up.

I waited. At last she said: "I've met her several times. Why?"

"Where and when did you meet her last?"

"At Maurice's house in Paris. She was at the cocktail party I told you about the night I met you."

"You didn't tell me where the cocktail party was."

"No, because I didn't want you interfering in my affairs and I still don't. I can look out for myself."

"You told me you had no recollection of anything that had happened after you left the party, but I am told you left with your stepfather. Don't you remember that?"

"I remembered afterwards, but my mind was hazy at the time."

"Because you'd been hypnotized?" She was silent. "Both you and Dorothy Harding were under hypnosis at the party. I have that on the authority of Maurice's manservant. Who was the hypnotist? Charles?"

"I'm not answering any more questions."

"Oh yes you are. Do you know where Dorothy Harding is now?"

"Somewhere in Fairlake, I think, but I haven't seen her since Paris." She spoke as if she couldn't care less.

"She's in Fairlake mortuary," I revealed.

She whipped round to face me. Her head came up, her eyes widened, her red mouth trembled. "Oh no!" she gasped. "No. That's not true."

"It's quite true, Clare."

"There must be some mistake."

"Don't try to delude yourself. There's no mistake. On

Sunday week you were both hypnotized in Paris. The same night you were almost drowned in the Seine, and a few nights later she was drowned in the Irish Sea."

"Dorothy was—was the girl you wanted Charles to identify?"

"The girl he refused to identify."

"She did it, then? I never thought she would."

"Did what?"

"Committed suicide."

"She was murdered."

"How can you say that! She drowned herself. She must have drowned herself. She threatened to."

"Why?"

"Oh, I can't tell you. I don't want to tell you. I won't tell you." She stamped her foot.

"Clare," I said, "you've got to face reality. Come out of that ivory tower. Dorothy was going to sue Charles for heavy damages for causing the death of her brother, then, mysteriously, she withdrew the suit, became apparently on good terms with Charles and the others and now she's been murdered."

"It was suicide."

"You're afraid Charles will hang and you have cause. Why did he refuse to identify her?"

"Because he's set his heart on winning the Open. He doesn't want any distractions."

"He's got a fat chance now."

"What are you going to do?" Her voice trembled.

"If I were you I'd retreat into my dream world and pretend it hadn't happened, but I'm not you. The girl's dead and her murderer's got to pay."

"It wasn't Charles."

"Then who was it?"

She put her hands up to her face and began to cry brokenly. "What can I do?" she sobbed. "What can I do?"

"You can tell the truth."

"I—I told you you'd only cause unhappiness if you went on with this."

"Are you prepared to condone the fact that Charles, who is your lover, made love to this girl, persuaded her to drop the suit against him and then callously got rid of her?"

"He didn't! He didn't!" She shook her head several times very quickly.

"Who did?"

"You're forcing me into a corner."

"Yes."

"I can't think how you traced me here, how you found out all this. It's uncanny." She dried her eyes with a wisp of handkerchief and essayed a smile.

"Routine detective work."

"It was more than that. You have the stuff of genius in you."

"Don't stall. I'm convinced you know who killed Dorothy Harding."

"If I did I wouldn't tell you."

I stood up. "All right," I said wearily, "let it go. I can do it without you."

"Do what?"

"Hang Charles." I could hear the silence throbbing like a pulse. The heavy scent of the roses filled my nostrils, then she caught my hand with a convulsive grab and drew me down again beside her. "You're terribly, terribly wrong."

"Then put me right."

She was quiet for a long time, then she said at last: "I don't know who killed Dorothy—if anyone did—but I know it wasn't Charles. She was never in love with Charles nor he with her." Her voice trailed off but I made no attempt to prompt her. After another long silence she said, "If I tell you, would it have to come out that you got it from me?"

"Not necessarily. I'll keep you out of it if I can but I can't promise."

"Very well." She sat straight up and gave a little shiver. "You've won, if it's any satisfaction to you. Dorothy Harding was madly in love with Maurice."

"Maurice!" I exclaimed.

She met my gaze firmly. "Yes, Maurice. Maurice has a way with women. Women are his profession and his recreation, and when Charles was threatened with that damages suit, he put Maurice up to go and see the girl in New York—he was over there at some Medical Congress at the time—and try to charm her out of it. Well, he succeeded. He succeeded only too well and he's had Dorothy round his neck ever since. I think he

was quite fond of her in his way but when she followed him to Paris it was a different story. She became a nuisance. Maurice keeps a young actress from the Comédie Française and she began to create about Dorothy so Maurice told Dorothy all was over. She took it badly, threatened to do away with herself and made scene after scene. She even threatened to resume the suit against Charles."

"Ah!" I said.

"No, you're wrong. Maurice relented for the sake of peace and gave her what she wanted, but she didn't trust him after that. She suspected he was two-timing her—which, of course, he was. She asked me to help her, to try to ascertain what Maurice's real feelings were. I said I would, to placate her, but I knew what his real feelings were."

"How did she get on with Charles?"

"Stop harping on Charles. She got on very well with him and with the rest of them, too, and we all liked her. When she got to know Charles better she forgave him for her brother's death. After all, it was a pure accident."

"It was an accident," I said. "Let's leave out pure."

"Let's leave out the cheap gibes. Dorothy knew we were all coming over here for the Championship and she told me she was going to come too, to be near Maurice. To keep an eye on him, she said. I told her every hotel in the town would be full but she said she would find some place. Well, I think she did find some place. I think she popped out on Maurice and Maurice got angry, told her to go to hell and she went—*via* the cold, grey water. I don't believe anybody killed her at all."

"Who hypnotized her at the cocktail party? Charles or Maurice?"

She was sitting with her head down, picking nervously at a loose thread in the seam of her slacks. "That had nothing to do with it; that was just silly."

"Which of them was it?"

"Well, if you must know, it was me. I'd never hypnotized anybody before, but I'd seen Charles do it often on the stage; he'd done it to me often, too. In public: never in private. We all got a bit high at the party and I said there was nothing in hypnotism, that anyone could do it. Charles bet me a thousand francs I couldn't hypnotize Dorothy so I tried and—it worked. I got her to put on a maid's apron, go in the kitchen

and make some drinks. Charles said that was a dirty trick, put me under, too, and made me do the same, but we were both out of it long before the party was over."

"Then someone else must have hypnotized you again?"

"I suppose so."

"Don't you know?"

"I don't know who it was. They can fix it that way, you know, the good ones. I've heard Charles say to a subject, 'When you awake you will have no memory of this', and you don't, but whatever he puts into your mind to do, you do it afterwards. Post-hypnotic suggestion, they call it."

"The post-hypnotic suggestion Charles put up to you wasn't a very nice one."

"I don't think it was Charles, for he'd have no reason to. It was probably Maurice, who doesn't like me much. Anyway, I warned him not to try it again."

"You warned Maurice?"

"I certainly did."

"So now you think you're safe?"

"I'm sure I'm safe."

"Suppose you warned the wrong man. Did he admit it?"

"Not he. But I don't think I warned the wrong man."

"What would his motive be?"

"I know something about him and one of his women patients. She's a friend of mine but he needn't worry; I would never tell it."

"Noble of you."

With an angry twist of her fingers she broke off the loose thread, then she raised her eyes to mine. There were tears in them. "You can forget about nobility," she said. "If Maurice got into trouble through anything I said, I'd lose Charles. Charles is terribly fond of Maurice and if anything happened to him he'd be heartbroken. He'd turn his back on me at once if I betrayed Maurice and I couldn't bear that. If I lost Charles I might do what Dorothy Harding did, so I'm warning you. Lay off."

"Charles didn't tell you it was Dorothy Harding in the mortuary?"

She shook her head. "No, he didn't say a word."

"He told Maurice."

"How do you know that?"

"On Friday evening Maurice picked up a girl who's staying here, Peggy Sinclair. I think he exercised his persuasive powers on her with some success and if so, he should have been pleased with himself next morning, but he wasn't. He was looking worried and upset and I think, now, that Charles must have told him that morning about Dorothy Harding."

"If he was looking upset it could have been because he thought she'd drowned herself, over him."

"Or because he was afraid of retribution overtaking him for having murdered her."

"You say I'm living in a world of my own, but so are you. You've got murder on the brain. Why don't you take up some other job?"

I smiled at her. She had spirit. "I also think Charles told Heloise," I said.

"He tells Heloise everything," snapped Clare spitefully. "She seems to be his pet confidante." She stood up. "Well, you've wrung me dry, haven't you? You've forced me to tell you things I never meant to and I'm not, repeat not, going to tell you anything more."

"Yes you are," I said, standing up also. "Why did you give Charles a cigarette-case inscribed *'Tirez le rideau, la farce est jouée'*?"

She smiled. Her face seemed to have filled out in the last few minutes and to have become less pale. Perhaps in unburdening her mind she had cast out fear. "To try to bring him up to the scratch," she said. "I thought he was straying in somebody else's garden. We had a row about it and I threatened to walk out on him. The cigarette-case was a farewell gift, to point the moral. It worked."

"He warmed towards you again?"

"Decidedly."

"He hadn't been straying after Dorothy Harding?"

"No."

"Who, then?"

She hesitated then she shrugged her pretty shoulders. "All right, I might as well go the whole hog now that I've started. It was Heloise."

"His brother's wife!"

"Charles wouldn't care whose wife she was if he found her desirable."

"Did you threaten to tell Gilles?"

"I did, as a matter of fact."

"You told me Maurice might have hypnotized you that night in Paris because you knew something about him and a woman patient. Could not Charles have done it because you knew something about him and Heloise?"

She shook her head with vigour. "That was over long ago —if it ever existed. I'm the jealous type and I might have been wrong."

"Could your stepfather have done it?"

"I don't think hypnotism is one of his gifts."

"He's a member of the Company of Magic."

"That's because he's interested in conjuring and sleight of hand." She put out a hand and smoothed the lapel of my jacket. It was a pleading gesture. "Please, Mr. Howard," she implored, "don't give away anything I've told you about Maurice. You came here to save me; don't destroy me."

"You could destroy yourself," I said. "Watch it, Clare."

"Oh, I will." She walked quickly away towards the hotel entrance and, after a few moments, I followed.

Lenore was sitting in the Rolls, reading her magazine, and I climbed into the driver's seat. "Golf course?" I asked.

"Please. If you can spare a little time for your wife."

I drove in a bleak silence for over a minute then Lenore said, "Interesting *tête-à-tête*?"

"Enlightening."

"If the great brain's working, don't let me interrupt."

I chuckled, took my left hand from the wheel, placed it over her right hand and squeezed. "You're very patient," I said, "and very, very sweet. I love you to distraction."

She nestled her head contentedly against my shoulder. "All right, darling. You can come out of the doghouse and tell me all about it."

The golf course presented a similar picture to the day before, except that the crowds seemed to have grown. We watched Fred Daly and Bobby Locke for a while, then looked in on Riedler, the American, who was playing well, and the young Scotsman, Duncan McIntyre, who was McKellar's fancy. McIntyre had completed the first round only three strokes behind Charles and what I saw of his play today was impressive. He was quietly dressed and of unassuming manner

but he had an easy, confident swing and a delicate touch on the greens that brought him several outbursts of applause from his small but faithful gallery.

We had coffee in one of the refreshment tents, a prowl round the Golf Traders' Exhibition, a look at the score-board and then we drove back to the hotel for lunch. A number of guests sprawled in deck-chairs on the lawn, waiting patiently for the gong, and one or two Championship contestants were practising their swings on inoffensive daisies. I spotted Sam Hickman talking to two of his professional colleagues, a driver held negligently in the crook of his arm, and then I saw Maurice sitting on a rustic seat nearby, between Heloise and Gilles.

I strolled over to Hickman and touched the shaft of his driver. "Lend me that a minute, will you?" I said. "I need exercise."

"Sure," agreed Hickman. He handed over the driver and I walked across the lawn, selected a spot close to Maurice's seat, laid my jacket across a garden table and began to swing the driver. After I had decapitated several daisies I stopped, leaned on the driver, mopped my perspiring brow, caught Maurice's eye and nodded.

"You have a nicely grooved swing," he complimented.

"I started young," I said. "Play golf yourself?"

"Only occasionally. I played hockey at school and cannot seem to get a golf club above my shoulder."

"It's quite easy really," I said. "Come and try."

He hesitated. "No. I don't think I——"

"Come on, have a go," I encouraged. "I'll show you how."

He got up reluctantly, took the driver, made a clumsy swing at a daisy and knocked up a piece of turf.

"You'll never swing properly with a jacket on," I told him. "Take it off."

Again he looked reluctant and I said, "Madame Rohan will take care of it for you."

He shrugged, removed his jacket, handed it to Heloise and took up the club again. His trousers were self-supporting, but buttons had been added in the usual places and, going round behind him under pretence of watching his swing, I saw that one of the back buttons was missing. The remaining

buttons were dark grey and bore the familiar lettering, 'F.F. Paris'.

He held the club awkwardly and I said: "Don't grip it so desperately. Take it up tenderly; lift it with care." He turned his head, smiling, and I said casually, "Know the poem?"

"Yes," he admitted, "a slight adaptation of the 'Bridge of Sighs' by Thomas Hood. Our English governess used to torment us by reciting it to us when we were children. She used to say that if we were not good little boys we would drive her to the river, too."

He tried another swing and this time slew a daisy. "Better," I said. "Do you know you've lost a button?"

"Yes. Fortunately I don't need to use them."

I produced the button I had found and let him see it in my hand. "Could this be it?"

He looked at the button then at me and all at once his face became blank as a slate. "Where did you get that?'

"I found it where you lost it. In Dorothy's chalet."

There was a long, grim silence. Then he said: "I see. I walked into your little trap very neatly, didn't I? I must be the original innocent abroad."

"If innocent is the word," I said.

He handed me the driver, took his jacket from Heloise's lap and put it on. He had the same quiet, deadly manner as Charles. "Do you know, Mr. Howard," he said silkily, "I'd be very careful indeed if I were you. You're living on borrowed time."

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

# DEATH OF AN ACTRESS

WE HAD been standing a little apart from the others, just out of earshot, and now, by mutual consent, we moved a few steps farther away still.

"You could be living on borrowed time yourself," I said.

"Please do not subject me to impertinence, Mr. Howard." Maurice's voice had a contemptuous edge to it. "I am not so stupid as you seem to think." He paused, and I could see that he was finding it an effort to keep calm. "I assume your purpose is blackmail."

"What could I be blackmailing you about?"

"Ah! You wish that I commit myself."

"There's no one listening," I pointed out.

He looked at me, his eyes ice-cold, his lips drawn back to reveal his strong white teeth. I thought he was going to attack me then and advanced the shaft of the driver a little towards him. He thought better of it. "Very well," he said when the silence had been stretched to breaking point. "The girl is dead. As you seem to know. She took her life because she was an empty-headed little fool, but it has nothing to do with any of us."

"It has to do with you," I accused.

"That I shall deny."

"Why did Charles refuse to identify her?"

"Surely that is obvious. We are in a foreign country whose laws are unknown to us and there is the Championship."

"Yes," I said bitterly, "Charles must have his Championship. A young girl is dead, lying alone and unwanted on a mortuary slab and he denied her as Peter denied Christ. Each one of you would have done the same. It is a case of cover her face, we don't want to see her, we don't want to know her, we want to forget about her. If she had never met us she would not have lost her life but what is that to us?"

"You are being unfair."

"Then why the conspiracy of silence?"

"I have just told you. We have no desire to embarrass Charles or to become embroiled with your police."

"What about embarrassing you?" I said. "You were her lover."

"You seem to know quite a lot."

"I know a hell of a lot."

"How much will you take to hold your tongue until after the Championship?"

I looked at him with contempt and anger. "There isn't that much money."

"So! I see we have to do with an idealist. What are you really after?"

"Someone who very nearly succeeded in committing the perfect murder."

Some of the colour went out of his face, leaving his tanned cheeks a dirty yellow. Then he laughed. It was a forced, unnatural laugh and we both knew it. "Your profession has gone to your head," he said roughly. "She drowned herself."

"Why?"

"Because I wouldn't marry her, I suppose, and because she did not have sufficient strength of character to accept the position. If every girl who was refused matrimony committed suicide it would soon solve the surplus women problem."

"You'd better tell me the whole story, hadn't you?"

"Perhaps that would be best but—not here." He spotted an empty seat under a tree on the far side of the lawn and led the way to it. We sat down side by side and he produced his gold cigarette-case. "Smoke?"

"I'll smoke my own, thanks."

"You condemn me unheard."

"I'll still smoke my own."

He shrugged. "As you wish. I suppose you know about Charles and Dorothy's brother?"

"I do."

"It was a piece of damnable misfortune which Charles could not have been expected to foresee and it ruined his career on the stage. That did not seem to be enough, however. This girl wanted damages, heavy damages, and it was probable that an American Court would have awarded them to her. Charles was in a panic; he had not enough money to pay and

he appealed to me for help. I went to see the girl and discovered that she was beautiful."

"I know," I said. "You taught her all you knew about the gentle art of seduction and when you had finished with her she was a sadder –if not exactly a wiser—girl."

"I was physically attracted to her. Have you always kept yourself pure?"

"Compared to you I'm as pure as the driven snow. While she was lying dead in the mortuary you were snuggled up in bed with another girl you'd picked up in the hotel. Peggy Sinclair."

"I did not know that Dorothy was in the mortuary for Charles did not tell me until next morning. I do not deny that women are my weakness. It has always been that way with me, but in that I am not unique. I made love to Dorothy, it is true, but I did not realize at first that she was so innocent, that she would take me so seriously.

"She became infatuated and soon I was finding her an embarrassment. She followed me to Paris, using the money her brother had left her, and finally I was forced to tell her that my intentions were not matrimonial. She refused to accept her *congé*, however, and I was forced to make love to her again—to keep the peace, you understand?"

"I understand," I said. "I understand the whole filthy business only too damned well. She must not be allowed to renew her lawsuit against Charles."

Maurice ignored the interruption. "She knew we were coming to England for the Golf Championship," he went on, "that Charles had set his heart on winning it. I said we would talk about the future when I returned, but that was not enough for her. She came to England, too, on her own and persuaded someone at the Town Hall to let her have a chalet that had fallen vacant. I did not know she was here until she telephoned me at the hotel. That was last Wednesday evening. She was in a difficult mood, almost hysterical. She demanded that I visit her at the chalet, and for the sake of peace I went. It was not a good meeting. She said that she would not have given herself to me if she had not loved me and believed that I loved her too. She said that unless I married her she would ruin me professionally and Charles financially. It was an ultimatum."

"And so she had to die," I said bitterly.

"I do not count myself responsible for her death in any way whatever. I had no idea when I left her that she contemplated suicide, but after I had gone she must have realized that it was hopeless and made up her mind to take her life."

"And the button?" I said.

"Ah yes, the button. I did not miss it until I was undressing for bed that night and then I did not think anything of it. Let it go, I thought. What is a button? But on Saturday morning Charles told me that he had seen Dorothy, dead, in the mortuary and that she must have drowned herself. He had not identified her because he did not wish to become involved, and then I realized that I might have lost the button at her chalet and I had no wish to become involved either. That night I went back to look for it and heard someone inside. You, I suppose?"

"Yes," I confirmed. "I must say you got off your mark pretty quickly."

"I wanted nothing to do with it, as I said. All that I know about it I have told you and I have no more to say."

The gong rang for lunch and I rose to my feet. "Saved by the bell," I said, "but neither you nor Charles have heard the last of this."

Lenore was waiting for me in the *foyer* of the hotel. "Revelations?" she asked.

"Up to a point. He confirms what Clare told me about Dorothy and him but denies he killed her."

"You could hardly expect him to admit it."

"I know. He insists that she drowned herself, and I must say he gave me the impression that that was what he actually believed."

The Rohans had their heads together all through lunch and several times I caught them looking across at me. It looked as if I had them badly rattled, which was all to the good. The cracks were beginning to show.

"What shall we do after lunch?" said Lenore. "Back to the golf course?"

I smiled at her. "You can go back if you like and you can have the Rolls, but I'd like a word with McKellar. He's keeping very quiet, which probably means that he's making progress."

"Whither thou goest, etc.," said Lenore. "I'm not leaving you alone again till we're out of Fairlake. We can both go up to the course after you've seen McKellar."

"There's no danger."

"I insist."

"All right, if you must," I surrendered. "Let's go."

We ran McKellar to earth at the police station. Lenore waited in the Rolls while I went in, and when I gave the desk sergeant my name I was shown in to McKellar almost at once. A room had been made available for him and he was sitting behind a large mahogany desk and looking like the lord of creation. He was speaking on the telephone and Sergeant Flowerdew was standing at his side. The sergeant smiled. The inspector glared. I hooked myself a chair, sat down, put my elbows on the desk and waited.

McKellar covered the mouthpiece with his large, bony hand. "Your cousin, the A.C.," he informed me.

"Tell him, hallo," I said. I could hear George's metallic voice clacking away nineteen to the dozen. He was evidently giving McKellar one of his pep talks and McKellar was not happy about it.

"Your cousin's just come in, sir," he said, cutting off the flow. "He wants to speak to ye."

"Liar," I said, but took the 'phone he pushed into my hand. "Well, George, still at it?"

"And what the hell have you been doing? Wasting your time on the golf course?"

"Isn't that what you wanted? You warned me not to annoy the Rohans."

"Circumstances have changed. I want Charles Rohan behind bars and I want him quick."

"What for?"

"I don't care what for, just so long as you or McKellar—or both of you—get him. Did he murder that girl or didn't he?"

"I don't know yet."

"Well, get to know. What's the use of fancying yourself as a brilliant detective if you don't do anything to justify your choice of profession?"

"Since you remind me that it's a profession," I said, "I'm spending a good deal of money on this case out of my own pocket. If I get Charles Rohan for you I'll want it back."

"You'll get it back—with interest—if you deliver the goods."

"Fair enough," I said, and hung up on him. I leaned back and looked at McKellar. "What's eating him?"

McKellar shrugged his high shoulders. "Been getting a rocket from the Home Secretary, I expect, and thought he'd like to pass it on. Haven't heard him in such good form for years. Came out with a couple of swear words even the sergeant here didn't know."

Flowerdew smiled seraphically but said nothing. He seldom spoke in the presence of his chief but he took everything in. I threw them each a cigarette and McKellar said, "Ye've got some news?" His voice was tinged with unusual eagerness, and the sergeant's eyes were fixed on my face like the eyes of an expectant terrier. "They must want Rohan desperately," I thought.

I told them of the attempt to brain me with a golf bag and what I had heard from Clare and Maurice. The inspector looked grim. "Doesn't help," he pronounced. "We're as far away from Charles as ever."

"It also occurred to me," I said, "that Dr. Palliser might bear watching." I gave them my theory about Palliser and they exchanged significant glances.

"Aye," said McKellar, "just so. Do ye remember the account he gave ye of his movements last Thursday evening?"

"I do."

"He lied."

I leaned forward. "Tell."

"Sergeant Flowerdew checked up on him. He keeps a car in a private garage round the corner from his house. It was out that night from before eight until nearly two in the morning."

"The devil it was! Sure it was he who took it out?"

"The attendant said so."

"Any idea where he went?"

"Not yet. We're working on it."

"What about that theatre programme?"

"Dead end. It wasn't the programme for that night at all. Ye'll remember it referred to a turn called 'The Three Dragoons'? Well, it seems they were on the previous week only."

"Hell! So she wasn't necessarily at the theatre on Thursday night at all?"

McKellar shook his head. "She might have been anywhere."

"They were all in Paris the previous week, so where could she have picked up that week's programme for Fairlake Theatre?"

"You tell me."

"Litter baskets on the pier?"

"Emptied every day."

"It might have been lying around her chalet."

"The chalets are cleaned out immediately they're vacated."

"Well," I said, "that one's yours so I'll leave you to it." I stood up. "Seen much of the golf?"

"I've nae time now to watch golf."

"Your boy McIntyre's doing well."

"Aye, and he'll do better yet. Yon Frenchman'll have to sweat for it—if he stays the course."

"Arresting him would be one way of cutting down the competition," I said. "See you around."

When Lenore and I reached the golf course we found a crowd of several hundreds massed in front of the score-board. They were chattering excitedly and we soon realized why. Duncan McIntyre had equalled the course record with a sixty-seven and his aggregate of one hundred and thirty-eight led the early returns by two strokes. Riedler was next at one hundred and forty and three famous players—a Britisher, an American and an Australian—had tied with one hundred and forty-one. Rohan's score was not up yet and a huge crowd on the skyline marked his position, well out on the course.

We joined them at the fourteenth hole and from the grim look on Charles' face it was obvious that things had not been going too well for him. The crowd had a somewhat subdued air and the stewards looked harassed. Clare was walking a few paces behind Charles, like a morganatic wife behind royalty, and her blue eyes were anxious. The sun did not seem to have affected her magnolia complexion.

I lost Lenore in the rush from the next tee and, looking round for her, spotted Dr. Palliser strolling placidly on the fringe of the crowd. The Fate of Charles did not seem to be causing him any anxiety, and as I came up behind him I heard him humming contentedly to himself.

"Hallo," I said. "What's been happening?"

He turned with that glassy, meaningless smile of his. "Oh, it's you! Just arrived?"

"Yes."

"You've missed all the fun then. Our Charles has blotted his copybook. The spectators have been giving a bit of trouble, swarming all over the place, and Charles twice complained about the stewarding. Then, just as he drove off at the ninth, a man left his place and started to run across the fairway. Charles' ball bounced on landing, struck this man on the thigh and was deflected into a bunker."

"Enough to start a war," I commented.

"It nearly did start one. Charles got the ball out but it trickled into another bunker and he threw his club after it. Then the man made the mistake of coming up to apologize, and I thought Charles was going to hit him. If Clare hadn't got between them he would have. The crowd have been very quiet since then, allowing the stewards to herd them about like sheep, but Charles is two strokes worse than McIntyre was at this point and only five holes to go."

"But, damn it, there are two rounds to play yet."

"I know, but Charles likes to be first all through. It's the way he's made."

We pushed through the crowd to a point of vantage behind the green and saw that Charles was left with a tricky three-yard putt. He took his time about it and was just about to strike the ball when a small boy, sitting on the grass in front of the rope barrier, wriggled a few inches nearer and caught Charles' eye. Charles straightened up, gave a gesture of vexation, walked across to the boy and said something to him in a low tone. The boy went very red and scrambled back under the rope. Charles returned to his ball, went through his pantomime again and sank the putt. Nobody clapped.

He did the next two holes in par, then, at the seventeenth, came one of those sensations that are the making of golf championships. Charles' second shot, pitched rather strong, overran the green and dropped into a bunker at the back. He walked up to the edge of the bunker, stood for a long time looking down at the ball, held a confabulation in dumb show with Absalom, then ordered the flagstick to be removed.

He disappeared into the bunker, which was a deep one,

his club-head flashed in the sun, the ball popped out in a shower of sand, ran about two yards and dropped into the hole. This time the crowd cheered him to the echo. He had them with him again.

"He has luck," observed Dr. Palliser, "and a man who has the golf and the breaks too, will be difficult to stop."

Charles played the last hole in a faultless but unexciting four, and his score of seventy-one gave him a two-round aggregate of one hundred and thirty-nine, one stroke behind McIntyre. I stood beside Dr. Palliser till the score was chalked up on the board, then I said, "By the way, do you remember the account you gave me of your movements last Thursday evening?"

"Yes, why?"

"It wasn't quite accurate, was it?"

He swung round to face me and for once he forgot to smile. "Been snooping, have you? You have a damnable cheek, Mr. Howard."

"Your car was out that evening for several hours. Did you drive it to Fairlake?"

"No, I did not drive it to Fairlake, and I resent anyone nosing into my private affairs. While I'm about it, I also resent the way in which you have been persecuting Clare. She's not strong, you know, and she's a very highly strung girl. She's been telling me about this Dorothy Harding business and I want to tell you here and now that neither she nor I are concerned in it in any way whatsoever. I hardly knew the girl."

"Then why did you lie about your movements?"

"My movements are none of your business."

"This is a murder case, Dr. Palliser."

"I don't believe it. The girl drowned herself. I heard all about it, but if you must know where I was that evening, I'll tell you. I was with a lady."

"That's an old one," I said.

"In this case it's true, as you can easily ascertain. For some time now I've been contemplating getting married again, to a girl—well, she's hardly a girl, she's in the mid-thirties—who is a lecturer at my university. Her name is Elsie Maynard and she lives at Prestwich, a few miles from Manchester. I was with her till quite late on Thursday evening."

"Anyone else see you with her?"

"No, she was alone in the house, which was the reason for my visit. As a man of the world you will understand."

"Have you ever practised hypnotism?"

"Never in my life." He produced a notebook, tore a page from it, scribbled on it and handed it to me. "There's her address and 'phone number. She'll confirm I was with her."

"I've no doubt she will, if she loves you enough."

He glared at me, the dark glasses seeming to glitter with a malevolence of their own. "Don't go too far, Mr. Howard," he threatened. "I'm a bad man to tangle with."

"I have that reputation, too," I said. "Do you know that Clare was hypnotized in Paris and almost drowned herself as a result?"

"Clare has often been hypnotized—although not with my approval. As for drowning herself; what nonsense!"

"You were both at a cocktail party in Maurice's house on the evening of Sunday week and you left together. Was Clare all right then?"

"So far as I remember, yes. A little withdrawn and dreamy, perhaps. A little difficult to reach with ordinary conversation, but then she is often like that. She lives in a world of her own."

"Did you both go straight back to your hotel?"

"We did. When we reached there I went to my room and she to hers. I did not see her again till next morning."

"Could she have gone out again that night without your knowing?"

"If she had wanted to. Our rooms were on different floors."

"Where were you at midnight on the following evening?"

"In bed, I expect. I can't remember. I don't know what you're trying to lead up to and I don't want to know. I shall answer no more questions and if you are a wise man you will ask none." He walked away with dignity and I let him go. McKellar could check up on his alibi later.

I was having a pre-dinner drink at the bar (while Lenore completed her toilet upstairs) when Clare came in. "Hallo," she said, seemingly in high good-humour, "drinking again? Dissolute man!"

"This is my first," I protested. "Have one with me."

She accepted a gin and lime and clinked her glass against

mine. "To the new British Open Golf Champion," she proclaimed. "Charles Rohan."

"Premature," I said.

"Nothing can stop him now."

"He has two rounds to go and he isn't even in the lead."

"He will be by the end of the third round. That's the round that finds out the weaklings, that spreadeagles the field. Most of them are tired and overstrained by then, but Charles is as strong as a Churchill tank. He'll be fresh at the finish."

"And after the finish?"

"I'll invite you to the wedding."

"You sound confident."

"I am very confident. Today he made an oblique reference to matrimony. Very oblique, but I'm quick in the uptake." She drank the rest of the gin and lime at a gulp, put the glass down on the bar counter unnecessarily hard and slid off the stool. "Just don't interfere," she said; "that's all."

As she walked out of the bar, Lenore arrived to claim me and the gong rang for dinner.

. . . . .

Friday carried no warning that it was to prove a day of destiny. The sky was blue, the sun bright, the breeze soft as a caress. Less than fifty now remained in the Championship and of these only about a dozen had a chance.

The Rohan camp was early astir and after breakfast only Heloise Rohan and ourselves remained in the lounge. I was reluctant to go out, for I had a feeling that West would 'phone, so Lenore and I settled ourselves in a corner with the morning papers. I was uncomfortably aware of the fact that Heloise was watching me but at last she rose to leave the lounge.

As she passed I said, "Not watching today?"

She shook her head. "Yesterday I wrenched an ankle in a rabbit-hole, so this morning I am to rest, but certainly I shall watch the last round in the afternoon."

"Do you think Charles is going to win?"

She looked me straight between the eyes. "Unless something—or someone—stops him, monsieur." She smiled. "Meantime I go to sit in the garden with a book."

I returned to my paper and the account of yesterday's

play. Charles came in for some adverse criticism of his display of temperament, but he was a hotter favourite than ever for the title. I turned a page idly and then a headline caught my eye and made my pulses quicken:

FRENCH LINER AT LIVERPOOL

The new French liner *Leeland* arrived at Liverpool early this morning on the first stage of her cruise to Bermuda. Reason for the Liverpool visit is to allow her passengers to watch the last stages of the Open Golf Championship and root for their favourite, Charles Rohan. After the Bermuda cruise it is rumoured that the *Leeland* will be going into service as a troop carrier in the Vietminh campaign.

Readers will remember the tragedy that marred the maiden voyage of the *Leeland* some months ago, when lovely young actress Venetia Lynn was lost overboard in the night. The mystery of her death has never been cleared up.

Beneath was a photograph of Venetia Lynn. She was the girl in the photograph I had found torn to shreds in Charles' waste basket.

I must have made some exclamation because Lenore looked up startled. "Anthony! What's the matter?"

I handed her the paper. "Read that. Venetia Lynn drowned in the Atlantic, Clare Thorne almost drowned in the Seine, Dorothy Harding drowned in the Irish Sea and the common factor in each case is Charles Rohan. I've been running round in circles suspecting everybody from Maurice Rohan to Dr. Max Edelmann of the Vallée des Fleurs, but this throws it right back in Charles' lap."

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

# THE NAME OF EVIL

LENORE stared at the paper, then at me. "Is he man or monster?" she said in a hushed voice.

"He's from the jungle," I said. "Oh, I know he had a good home and was well brought up, but all the same he's from the jungle. Nothing will turn him from his appointed path and nothing is going to turn me from mine. Sooner or later we'll collide and when we do, we'll both remember it."

"What are you going to do?"

"I don't know. I'm all mixed up. I came here because a dazed girl tried to drown herself in the Seine and that girl led me to Charles. Now, somehow, she no longer seems important. Charles is the one; the one who must be stamped on, quickly, before he can do any more damage."

The amplifier above the lounge door cracked. "Will Mr. Anthony Howard come to the telephone, please." The message was repeated but by then I had reached the office. It was West. "I've found that liner, sir," he announced with pride.

"Yes?"

"She's the *Leeland*. Charles Rohan sailed on her maiden voyage and so did his two brothers and Heloise Rohan."

"Anyone else I've mentioned in this case?"

"No, sir. There was a girl lost overboard that voyage."

"Yes, I know. Venetia Lynn. You've done well, West."

"Thank you, sir. I haven't heard yet who hypnotized those two girls at the cocktail party."

"You can drop that," I said. "I've cleared that one up."

"Very good. Is there anything else, sir?"

"No. I think I've got everything now. Everything I need."

Yes, I had everything now. There were the things I had discovered or that West had discovered for me, the conversations I had overheard or taken part in, the characters of the people I had met. It was all there, the raw material of murder and treason, if only I could put it together, could recognize what was significant in conversations and character.

I went back to Lenore, who was staring out of the window.

"Anthony," she said, "do you remember, when we discussed hypnotism at first, you said that a hypnotist couldn't change a person's character, that before he could make a person commit suicide, that person would have to be the suicidal type?"

"Yes."

"Well, here we have three girls, all apparently hypnotized by Charles, two of them drowned and one almost drowned. Doesn't it seem rather much of a coincidence that they should all have suicidal tendencies?"

"Yes," I said, "that's been at the back of my mind. It worries me."

"Could it be that Charles is the exception? That he is so skilful he can change a person's nature? After all, what does medical science really know of hypnotism? It's comparatively new and one never knows what it may include."

"If Charles can do that he's the father and mother of all hypnotists, and I know what McKellar would say."

"What?"

"I don't believe it."

"And neither do you?"

"And neither do I."

"What do you believe, then?"

"I believe that Charles Rohan is a villain; I believe there is nothing he would not do to save his own skin and I believe that he is contemplating an act of treason." I took out the photograph again and saw the words on the back. "*Remember we are depending on you.*" I read them aloud. "Blackmail," I said. "Blackmail, but not for money. For services. Those words mean, 'Do what we have ordered you to do and all will be well. Refuse and this photograph goes to the police'."

"Who are 'we'?"

"The Communists. The cold war experts. This stinks of their methods, getting people into their power and using them ruthlessly for their own filthy ends. This is how they work all over the world. They traffic in human souls. They are the very name of evil, and what better hunting-ground than the boat-deck of a liner at night? A place where illicit love affairs flower like weeds. The insignificant little man with the tiny camera; hiding behind the ventilator cowl; creeping in the shadow of a deckhouse; hoping to catch some husband with

someone else's wife, to involve them inescapably in the Communist net."

I broke off with a bitter laugh. "The agent on the *Leeland* got a prize. He got Charles Rohan in the act of murder. There's no limit to what they could make him do after that."

"So that's why Heloise Rohan is worried about traitors!"

"Yes," I said. "Heloise knows something—and Heloise is in the garden." I shuddered. The shudder was at myself.

"Anthony!" exclaimed Lenore. "What's the matter? You've gone quite white and you've got that lost look on your face. I haven't seen it for months."

"It's what I have to do," I said. "I hate it and I hate myself because I have to be the one. I feel like Judas."

"Why?"

"Because I have to take advantage of Heloise's patriotism. She's a good woman, Lenore, and she loves France. She would give her life for France as Joan of Arc did, as Odette Churchill would have done. She is of the same stamp. She gave her lover for her country and now I have to persuade her to give her husband's brother."

"But if he is a murderer and a traitor it's right she should denounce him."

"I know, but she's fond of him in her way. Clare said I would bring unhappiness to someone if I went on with this case and this is the start of it. I have to bring unhappiness to Heloise."

"You must do what you think right."

"Yes. Who was it wrote, 'If I had to choose between betraying my country or my friend, I hope I would have the courage to choose my country'?"

"Don't torture yourself, darling. Go and get it over."

"Wait for me," I said, and went out into the garden. Judas had gone out into a garden too.

Heloise was sitting under a tree, reading a book. It was the same seat on which Maurice had told me of his affair with Dorothy Harding. I sat down beside her and she gave me a bright smile of welcome. "Good book?" I asked.

"The latest Sartre." She laid the book down and looked at me quizzically. "Well, and what is it to be?" she asked. "Conversation or cross-examination?"

"You are very direct."

"That is not a good thing to be?"

"Not always."

"You yourself prefer to proceed with circumcision?"

I looked at her in surprise, then it dawned. "You mean circumspection."

"Ah yes, that is it. Circumcision means something quite different, does it not?"

"It does indeed. You are laughing at me."

She dimpled becomingly. "Perhaps a little. You look so solemn, so severe. As if all the burden of the world was on your shoulders. You should laugh a little sometimes and be gay." She looked up. "Like the birds."

The birds were fluttering about the lawn and singing in the trees around us. "The birds are not always gay," I said, and quoted, "'All the birds of the air were a-sighing and a-sobbing when they heard of the death of poor Cock Robin'."

"Ah yes, that charming little song."

"I'm making a parody of it."

"Recite it to me."

"I have only one verse so far. It goes like this:

'Who saw her die?
I, said the spy,
With my camera eye;
I saw her die.'"

I looked at a woman who had gone as pale as a ghost. She seemed to have shrunk all at once into herself and only her eyes were alive in her stricken face. She knew, at that moment, the cross she would have to bear.

I waited while she struggled for composure. At last she spoke and I had to lean sideways to catch her words. "So! It has come then."

I bowed my head without replying and heard her choke on a sob. "What must I do?"

"Tell me everything."

"Just you?"

"And the police—later."

She shuddered and I think the shudder was at me. "I knew from the beginning that you had come for this," she said. "That we were lost. When I first saw you in that little café in the mountains, you had a look on your face such as you have

now. The look of a man who loathed what he had to do but who would do it. You killed a man that night?"

"He was a traitor."

"I should not have said what I did about traitors. You were so quick to seize upon it. So quick. How much do you really know?"

"As much as this," I said, and let her see the photograph. She recoiled from it with a low cry. "You have seen it before?" I asked.

She nodded. "Twice they sent Charles a copy; as a reminder and a warning."

"A beautiful young girl lost overboard from the *Leeland* in the Atlantic night and only you and I and Charles—and the man who took that photograph—know how it happened."

"He was a Communist agent."

"Yes, and with the negative of this in his possession his possibilities for mischief are unbounded, with Charles as his instrument."

"That is true."

"There is only one way to break his power," I said, "and that is to expose Charles. Why did he kill Venetia Lynn?"

"He did not kill her. It was an accident."

"He did not hypnotize her and compel her to jump overboard?"

"As God is my witness, no! He met this girl on board, danced with her and was attracted to her. He made advances to her but she refused him. Then one night he had one drink too many—and attacked her. You understand?"

"Too well. He wanted to take by force what she would not give him willingly?"

"Yes, but he was not himself. He was flushed with wine. He followed her into her cabin and seized her. She struggled, broke away from him and ran out to the boatdeck with Charles in pursuit. She sat on the rail and dared him to come a step nearer. She was *hystérique* and threatened to jump overboard.

"Charles realized that he had gone too far. He did not believe her threat but he was afraid she would denounce him to the captain. He stepped forward to calm her and at the same moment the siren of the ship made *un grand bruit*. The girl was startled and, all in an instant, she overbalanced and fell.

"Charles ran to the rail but there was no sign of her. The sea was *agitée*; she had told him she could not swim a stroke, and he felt certain she had been sucked into the ship's screws and killed instantly. No one appeared to have seen the accident and—he did not report it."

"Because he feared that if she were rescued he might be charged with attempted rape?"

"Because he was certain that she was dead."

"Did she not cry out when she fell?"

"If she did her cry was lost in the echo of the siren. You see, the *Leeland's* sister ship was passing on the other side and the siren was to greet her. Everyone was watching the other ship—everyone but the Communist agent with the camera, lying in wait behind the funnel.

"Charles knew nothing of this. Next morning I saw that he looked worried and when I heard that Venetia Lynn was missing I suspected that he knew something about it. When I asked him he told me what had happened. He has always told me things."

"And you did nothing?"

"What could I have done? It was much too late." She looked at me imploringly but I did not speak. "It was a month later that the photograph came," she went on. "Charles received it in the post and brought it straight to me. On the back it said, *'Remember this?'* We thought it was the start of a scheme of blackmail but nothing happened for three weeks more. Then a second copy of the photograph arrived and on the back of it was written, *'We have a copy for the police, too.'*

"Next day a man spoke to Charles in the street, showed him a copy of the photograph and told him to be at a certain café at noon on the following day. He went and of what happened then I have no knowledge."

"Did you ask him about it?"

"Yes. He said that he had met two men and that they were Communists. I asked if they had wanted money and he said no. I said, 'What did they want?' And he looked at me for a moment with tortured eyes, then he said, 'Not much; just my soul.' He would say no more, but since then I have been afraid. They are forcing him to some illegal act under threat of exposure, but I do not know what it is."

"What about the caddie, Absalom?"

"He is one of them. It is not Charles' wish that Absalom is with him. He has been assigned to Charles, to see that he obeys orders. And whatever Charles has to do, it must be soon because Absalom is returning to his own country after the Championship. He is not accompanying Charles further."

"And where is Charles going?"

"America. He is leaving from Liverpool tonight in the *Leeland* for Bermuda and he will fly from there to New York. He is to play in some of the big golf tournaments there."

"Madame Rohan," I said quietly, "I want you to tell all this to Detective-Inspector McKellar."

"No."

"It is the kindest thing for Charles. If the truth comes out about the death of Venetia Lynn, the Communist power over him will be broken, and if he tells the police all he knows about these Communists they may accept his version of the girl's death and deal with him lightly."

"Do you think so?"

"I do. Provided, of course, and I must say this, that there are no other charges that could be preferred against him."

"Let me think about it a little."

"There is not much time if he leaves tonight."

"Just for a little while. I have a *tendresse* for Charles. We played together as children."

"Very well." I rose. "I am not inhuman."

"You are a good man, monsieur, a man of integrity and I know this has not been easy for you."

I returned to Lenore and as I told her, all at once, as if a curtain had risen in my mind, I saw the whole thing clear. I knew the task that had been laid on Charles, the evil he meant to do.

Two minutes later we were in Charles' bedroom and I was ripping the paper off one of the golf balls. The ball was perfect in every detail. You could not see the join unless you looked closely, but it was there. The top half came away as I unscrewed it, like a toy Easter egg.

"My God!" I said. "Did you ever see anything as devilish as that?"

Lenore peered at the object in my hand. "What is it?"

"An incendiary bomb of the latest type. Each of these little strokes on the dial represents one hour and, by setting

that pointer opposite one of them, you can fix the time for it to operate. You can set it up to twelve hours ahead if you like and at the appointed hour a plunger is freed to make contact with the combustible material and—up she goes." I paused. "Charles sails tonight in the *Leeland*. He is to leave her at Bermuda but, before he leaves, he will plant these incendiaries in various parts of her, timed to go off long after he has gone. The stuff they use nowadays is terribly powerful, a ship's sprinkler apparatus would have as much effect as a spring shower on an erupting volcano and Charles knows just where to hide them to produce the best results. He is familiar with the *Leeland*."

"It will happen at night when the passengers and most of the crew are ashore, and in no time at all the *Leeland* will be a flaring torch. He'll have no trouble with the Customs getting these balls on board for it's natural that a professional golfer should be carrying golf balls."

Lenore stared at me. "Then that's why McKellar is up here?"

"Yes. He was on the Southampton Dock case; sabotage on liners and, somehow, he must have got a line on Charles Rohan. He has to stop him boarding the *Leeland*, but as Charles is a foreign national, McKellar must have a good reason to act. He'll have it."

. . . . .

"So soon?" said Heloise piteously when I returned to her.

"Yes. Charles is going to burn the *Leeland*."

"How do you know?"

"You gave me the key when you said he was sailing in that ship tonight."

"You're so quick. I don't know what to do."

"Have you ever seen a big ship on fire? I have. It's an awesome sight. The *Leeland* was built with French money, with French skill and sweat. Soon she will carry French troops to the war in French Indo-China—if she still floats. Must I remind you, madame, that you, too, are French?"

She stood up. "Take me to your policeman," she said. "I have decided."

McKellar was alone when I was shown into his room. "Well," I said, "and are you going to save the *Leeland*?"

It did not show on his face but I could sense that he was thunderstruck. "She's guarded day and night," he said, "and I've just given orders for the guards to be doubled."

"She isn't scheduled to go up at Liverpool," I said, "but at Bermuda." I rolled the golf ball across the desk to him. "There are eleven more of these in Charles Rohan's bedroom."

He looked at the golf ball, caught on, looked at me and slowly took the top off. "Thanks," he said. One word, but from him it was enough.

"I've got Heloise Rohan outside in the car," I said. "She'll tell you the rest of it. What brought you after Charles in the first place?"

"We rounded up a few suspects in the Southampton Dock case and on one of them we found a notebook containing the names of ships that had been fired and the name of a man opposite each; obviously the man entrusted with the job. They had all been marked off but one, the *Leeland*, and opposite her was the name C. Rohan. Our Special Branch had already been investigating Charles Rohan because of his caddie, who is a known Communist. We found out that the *Leeland* was soon to be at Liverpool, that Rohan would be playing in the Open, within an hour and a half's car journey from Liverpool, and had booked a passage on the *Leeland*, so I was sent up here with orders to stop him boarding her at all costs.

"I could get nothing on him until your Dorothy Harding case broke and I hoped we might get him for that."

"You still might," I said, "but you've enough to go on with."

"How did ye get on to this?"

I told him about Absalom and the parcel and he scowled. "We had a tail on Absalom but Absalom ditched him. Good thing ye were around."

"I have my uses," I said. I produced the photograph and Dorothy's letter and threw them on the desk. "Have these, too, but don't ask me where I got them."

I left Heloise with McKellar and drove back to pick up Lenore. As I pulled up at the hotel two words sprang unbidden into my mind, two words I had heard recently spoken without realizing their significance. It was as if my subconscious had

collected them, kept them in store until I had cleared up the mystery of the photograph and, now that my mind was clear, had dangled them significantly before me. Two innocent little words spoken in innocence, pointing to guilt.

It was like a cold douche breaking over me and I shied away from it. Then, as my thoughts raced, I realized how it all fitted, how the jig-saw fell into place, how blind I had been. I was shaking as I entered the hotel and Betty Beamish looked her surprise when I demanded that a call be put through immediately to the Hôtel Crillon in Paris.

The call took time while I paced back and forth across the hall, fuming with impatience, but at last I was through. Yes, Dr. Max Edelmann was in and would speak with me. He had just finished *déjeuner*. I breathed a fervent prayer that he could speak English. He could.

I told him enough about the case to interest him and then I asked him one question. He answered unhesitatingly in the affirmative and when I replaced the receiver I knew why Dorothy Harding had died.

We had a quick lunch, eaten in silence, for I was still working things out, then we drove down to the town and Lenore waited in the car while I made three separate calls. The last two gave me what I wanted and with death in my heart we drove up to the golf course.

The last stages of the Championship were being played out in terrific tension and, when we looked at the score-board, we saw why. Charles had broken the course record with a sixty-six and his aggregate of two hundred and five led by three strokes. McIntyre, having taken seventy, was second with two hundred and eight and the rest were nowhere. That testing third round had broken most of them and Charles and McIntyre were the only two with a chance. To add to the drama they had been paired together and by now they had reached the inward half of the last round.

The crowd marched over the course like an invading army, like a swarm of locusts. There must have been twenty-five thousand people out there, each one of them bursting with excitement. We reached them at the twelfth hole, merged with them and were engulfed. The large French contingent from the *Leeland* could scarcely contain themselves. The normally phlegmatic Scots were praying desperately to their

Presbyterian God. The stewards ran and swore and sweated in the summer heat. The diced caps of the police were everywhere.

"If they arrest him now," I said, "there will be a hell of a riot."

We learned that McIntyre had gained a stroke by the turn, having gone out in thirty-four to Charles' thirty-five and now, with six holes to play, Charles was still leading by two strokes. Both hit perfect drives from the thirteenth tee, then McIntyre crashed a mighty brassie shot to the heart of the green. We pushed in as close as we could get to Charles but there was someone who pushed closer still.

Lenore clutched my arm. "Heloise!"

"Stop her!" I said, but we were too late. She had wormed her way through and was at Charles' elbow. She gulped out a stream of words and I saw Charles' face go pale under his tan. "She's warned him," I said. In the forefront of the crowd, on the other side of the fairway, I saw McKellar's face. It was black as thunder.

Charles tightened his lips, squared up to his ball and the groan that burst from the crowd could have been heard miles away. The ball, hopelessly mishit, bounced over the hard ground and charged straight into a yawning bunker about fifty yards in front. Absalom ran to Charles' side, his eyes one wild question. Charles rounded on him, talked rapidly on his fingers and Absalom went a dirty yellow. He looked desperately this way and that, as if seeking a way of escape, but the crowd was as solid as a mountain.

Charles snatched a club out of the bag, pushed Absalom contemptuously away and went down into the bunker. The ball, too cleanly hit, did not rise sharply enough, caught the lip of the bunker and fell back into the sand. He got it out with the next stroke but it took him another stroke still to reach the green and two more to get down. McIntyre, down in four, now took the lead and the news spread far and wide over the course, "Rohan's cracked."

I saw Clare's face, white and strained, and remembered something Dr. Palliser had said of her, that she would not just be watching Charles play, that she would *be* Charles. His fate would be her fate. She had identified herself with him absolutely.

At the next hole Charles pulled his drive, recovered shakily from the rough but, with McIntyre bunkered to the left of the green, snatched a half in five. At the fifteenth he seemed to pull himself together, to crush his fears from his mind and to play with all his old fire and skill. But McIntyre, inspired now, matched him shot for shot.

I watched Charles with unwilling admiration. God knows what was in his heart and mind, but he kept striding on, playing now like a machine while the huge, unruly crowd streamed after him or ran ahead of him with oohs and ahs and groans and bursts of applause. They were getting out of hand, stampeding through bunkers, swarming across greens to keep beside him and yet Charles was alone out there, alone and betrayed. But he had to be the best.

And so, at last, they came to the last hole. Both balls lay on the green in two and Charles was still one stroke behind. McIntyre putted first, missed, and was down for four. The crowd cheered him then silence fell like a blanket as Charles stepped up to his putt—the putt he must sink to tie. He stood there a long time while tension rose and the silence grew heavy as a thundercloud. I saw his white, agonized face and knew what he himself must know, that he couldn't do it. The police had closed in and a ring of diced caps cordoned the green.

"Bloody cops," I heard someone complain, "pushin' in and blindin' other folks."

I thought Charles would never play, never make that last vital stroke. Then, in a flash, it was over; he missed the three-yard putt by an inch and was lost. The groans were drowned in a roar of cheers for the victor and, as the crowd broke through on to the green and swept McIntyre up shoulder high, Charles saw his chance.

He turned suddenly, threw his putter at Absalom and dashed into the crowd. Taken by surprise, they parted to let him through, and after him bobbed the police caps as their wearers pushed and struggled.

Charles was making diagonally towards me and I moved to place myself directly in his path. He did not see me until he almost blundered into me and then he tried to shoulder me aside. I held my ground and when he tried to move round me I moved in front of him again.

He said one very rude word in French and then I let him

have it. "With the compliments of Venetia Lynn," I said. It was one of my better punches. It could not have travelled more than eight inches, but Charles travelled much farther than that, back into the arms of Detective-Inspector McKellar. He gave a mighty heave but McKellar held him and he went down fighting under a swarm of policemen.

I felt Lenore's hand on my arm. "And now?" she asked.

"To finish it," I said grimly.

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

# THE MOMENT OF TRIUMPH

THERE was no sound from Clare's bedroom but I knew that she was there. She had been there for at least an hour. I knocked and entered.

She was slumped in an armchair beside the bed, her face a white mask of misery, her eyes open but unseeing. She was not crying. It had gone too deep for the relief of tears. I sat down on the bed and looked at her. *"Tirez le rideau,"* I said. *"La farce est jouée."*

She raised her tragic eyes to my face. "What will they do with him?"

"Plenty. He won't be around again for quite some time."

"I'll wait for him."

"No," I said. Something came into her eyes then; a flicker of apprehension, a shadow of fear. "Clare," I went on, "this is the moment of triumph you taunted me with but I am not enjoying it. It is a bitter moment, a very bitter moment indeed. I came here to save you and now I must destroy you. When you said I would bring unhappiness to someone, you were thinking of yourself, weren't you?"

The silence in the room was like the silence of eternity. Then she said in a low, dispirited voice, "You—know?"

"Yes. I've pieced it all together now, partly from character-study, partly from fragments of conversation. 'We wouldn't have met if it hadn't been for a doctor.' 'I wanted to go on the stage once but life caught up with me.' Your answer when I asked if you'd ever wanted to commit suicide. Was that when you were told you had tuberculosis?"

"Yes. How did you find out?"

"From Dr. Edelmann. You were a patient of his for two years at the Vallée des Fleurs."

"That was a long time ago. I'm cured now."

"I've noticed you don't take on the sun. Isn't that a sign?"

"I tell you I'm cured."

"Try telling Charles that. He worships physical fitness.

He can't endure sick people. He would fly them as he would the plague. Do you remember Maurice telling me that?"

She nodded listlessly. She was wearing her tweed skirt and lilac sweater and she began to pluck nervously at a loose strand of wool on the front of the sweater. She seemed to be only half aware of what I was saying.

"Recently, Dr. Edelmann was released from Korea," I said. "He was coming to Paris and would contact Dorothy Harding. I suppose she must have let you read her aunt's letter. She would introduce him to the Rohans and he would hear about you and Charles. You would be bound to meet again and it would come out that you'd been a patient of his. Once a whisper of that reached Charles you wouldn't have seen him for dust. That's what you feared, wasn't it?"

There was no answer and I repeated the question. "Yes," she admitted. "I was desperate."

"Until the cocktail party when you discovered you could hypnotize Dorothy Harding and saw a way of getting rid of her, of removing the only link between Dr. Edelmann and the Rohans. You left the party with your stepfather and he told me you were withdrawn and dreamy. That was because you were working out yor uplan. You think and plan quickly as, later, I had reason to know, and by the time you reached your hotel you had evolved your clever little scheme about *l'Inconnue de la Seine* with Dorothy cast for the part of *l'Inconnue*.

"Your head was full of it and you longed to be by yourself to perfect it. You went out again, alone, still planning; loving it—living it. You were no longer Clare Thorne, you were Dorothy Harding, you were *l'Inconnue de la Seine*. Do you remember me saying to you that you were a psycho-neurotic and that when I discovered your particular neurosis I'd be awfully near the truth?"

"I remember." Her voice was dead.

"I can name it now. Identification. A child identifies itself with older persons; engine-drivers, actresses, famous people. It's a form of hero-worship and quite natural in a child but, sometimes, the capacity for identification continues into adult life, due, usually, to the deprivation of love in childhood and that is when it becomes a neurosis. Your stepfather told me you were neglected as a child, that the games you played were too real to you, that you would not only be watching Charles

play, you would *be* Charles. Conversations again, Clare, insignificant until you realize the truth and then, thinking back, they become very significant indeed.

"Do you remember when I found you reading Keats? 'And for many a time I have been half in love with easeful death.' That was you on the night we met, in love with easeful death, the easeful death you were planning for Dorothy Harding on the morrow.

"Your steps took you inevitably to the Quai du Louvre. You were still being Dorothy Harding, still having a nice little rehearsal with yourself, a rehearsal for murder. You did not see me standing there, in the shadow. You thought you were alone. You went purposefully down the steps. You felt the spell of the river. This was how it would happen, you thought. This was how you wanted it to happen, just as you planned. You dropped your bag as you thought she might do. You dropped your fur wrap. Then I suppose you would have cried enough, stopped acting and gone back to your hotel. It must have been a shock to you when I ran down the steps and caught your arm."

"It was." Her voice was still without animation and she would not meet my gaze.

"You decided it would be better to continue the farce, to pretend you did not know what you were doing. You thought I was just an ignorant bystander who would go away afterwards and think no more about it. I must say you did it well for I really believed you were in a hypnotic trance. I believed it for a long time but you let me get you out of it too easily. Later, when Charles hypnotized my wife, I couldn't get her out of it at all and that set me thinking.

"You let me take you to that café where you recognized me—and saw the red light. I was a private detective, the one man who might be interested enough to follow up, so, as quickly as you could, you ditched me. But you were worried. You wondered if I would be watching at the Quai du Louvre next night and decided to find out. You were the man in black. A spare pair of your stepfather's black spectacles and his evening clothes—or perhaps you hired them from an agency. It doesn't matter. No wonder you fainted when you saw me coming down the stairs on the night of your arrival here.

"Then you saw my advertisement and knew I was really

after you. You came to my hotel to leave a note, saw me go out with my wife and followed us until my wife left me at the hairdresser's. You tried to catch up with me then and you were close behind me at the street corner. You saw the moving taxi, you saw me step off the footpath and, quick as a flash, you tripped me up. There were so many people milling about the corner no one noticed it happen and, when they gathered round me, you disappeared in the confusion. I'm right so far, am I not?"

"Dead right." She was looking at me now and her face had gone sullen. "I meant to speak to you, to plead with you to drop it but when I saw the taxi I acted on the spur of the moment. It—it seemed the thing to do."

"Having failed to kill me you realized it would be safer to call off your scheme meantime. Charles and his relatives would be in England for the Championship and would not be likely to meet Dr. Edelmann until they returned to France, so Dorothy could stay alive a little longer. Then she told you she was coming to Fairlake too, and at once you started working out a new plan. The basic idea was the same but you had to drop *l'Inconnue de la Seine* and think of something else. You thought of 'The Bridge of Sighs', the unwanted girl who drowned herself. You didn't think I would connect a drowning tragedy in the north of England with the incident on the Quai du Louvre. I might never even hear of it, so you asked Dorothy Harding to contact you at Fairlake, to come and see you at the house where you had arranged to baby sit on the Thursday evening—21 Marchmont Road.

"She came. You talked. You made coffee and sandwiches and you put half a sleeping tablet in the coffee to weaken her resistance to hypnotism. Who got the other half? The baby?"

"As a matter of fact, yes."

"I thought so. It wouldn't have done for the baby to wake up while you were out. You told Dorothy how thrilled you were at being able to hypnotize her and asked if you could try again—just for fun. She agreed. When she was under you looked about for a piece of paper and picked an old theatre programme out of the fireplace. There hadn't been a fire in the living-room for weeks and the grate was full of rubbish. You tore off a piece of the programme and made Dorothy write the words, 'Anywhere, anywhere out of the world' on the back of it.

"So far so good. Then you told her her lover was finished with her, that there was nothing left for her but the river, like the poor girl in the poem. You told her she was that girl, that she must drown herself and then you went out together. You daren't risk letting her go alone because, as a hypnotist, you were not in the same class as Charles; you were just his pale shadow and you didn't trust her to go through with it because you didn't trust your own skill. You led her to the pier, you concealed her and yourself till the pier closed, you took her hatpin and then you told her to jump."

"Is this what you call imaginative reconstruction?" She was sneering now, coming alive, growing dangerous, like an awakened snake.

"It is. Close?"

"Close enough. But she wouldn't jump. In the end I had to push her. I knew she couldn't swim but I could hear her splashing about in the water and calling for help. I was terrified someone else would hear but no one did. Then she went under." She began to shudder uncontrollably in her chair.

"Yes," I said grimly, "she went under. You thought you were safe then. There was no one now who would be likely to introduce Dr. Edelmann to Charles. You had committed the perfect murder—but for one thing."

"What was that?"

"You should have got her fingerprints on the hatpin. You were so scared of leaving your own prints, so careful to wipe the knob—and no prints at all spelled murder."

"I never thought of that."

"You have to think of so many things when you plan a murder. Sometimes unplanned murders are safest, like the time you nearly got me with the golf clubs. It was you, of course?"

"Yes. I saw you from the lavatory window, then I saw the clubs in that man's bedroom. When you met me in the corridor I was really going along to see Charles and I didn't know until then that I had missed you."

"You bore your disappointment well, also the moment when you first recognized me at this hotel. That must have been quite a shock."

"I nearly died. I thought you knew, then, but it was worse when I realized you suspected Charles."

"Whom you so desperately loved."

"Yes. What made you realize it was me?"

"Two little words, Clare. Two little words you said to me in the bar only last night, when you were feeling happy and relaxed because you thought you had set me on to Maurice with your lies. 'Dissolute man.' You didn't realize you were quoting from 'The Bridge of Sighs', the poem that was so much in your mind. You remember the lines now, don't you?

'In she plunged boldly—
No matter how coldly
The rough river ran.
Over the brink of it,
Picture it, think of it.
Dissolute man.' "

"I have been a blundering fool, haven't I?"

"I wasn't much better. You had me fooled for long enough; but why in God's name didn't you think of trying to contact Dr. Edelmann first and asking him to keep his mouth shut?"

"He wouldn't have done it. He had a thing about T.B. cases marrying –for the sake of the unborn children. He'd have felt it his sacred duty to warn Charles."

"Your stepfather knew?"

"Yes, but he would never have told. What are you going to do?"

"Turn you in," I said. "I can't compromise with murder, Clare."

"I haven't lost the last trick yet," she muttered. She was fumbling with the handbag on the table beside her chair and when she faced me again she was holding the one thing I had forgotten—my missing gun.

"Where did you get that?" I said, and was pleased that my voice stayed steady. "It was stolen before you arrived."

"Heloise took it and I persuaded her to give it to me." I saw her finger tighten on the trigger and the round eye of the muzzle stared me darkly in the face. "I should have done this long ago," she said with venom.

"Wait!" I rapped out. Perhaps I could bluff her out of it. It was my only hope. "Shooting me won't save you. McKellar knows."

The gun-barrel wavered. "He knows?"

"If not, he'll soon know. Today I went to 21 Marchmont Road and Mrs. Paton let me search her living-room. That's

how I found the torn theatre programme, and I left it there for McKellar. He knows you were there that night and he'll be checking up. Then I called at the houses on each side of 21 and in 23 I found a real curtain-peeping, seaside landlady. She saw Dorothy arrive at 21 and later she saw you both go out. McKellar will enquire there, too."

The gun-barrel wavered again, dropped lower.

"Whatever you do, you've lost Charles," I went on. "If I hadn't come here after you he would have set that lovely ship on fire and cost God knows how many lives. I was just the instrument of Fate and shooting me wouldn't bring him back to you."

"No," she said, listlessly again. "It is finished. Everything's finished." All at once she gave a little moan of despair and held out the gun to me. "Here, take it. I don't hate you. I don't hate anybody." Her head came up in that proud, defiant gesture of hers. She was facing reality at last.

I made no move to take it. Instead I looked her straight in the eyes. "Oh, I expect I'll get it back all right," I said, "afterwards."

She lowered her head again and her shoulders slumped. She had got my meaning all right. "Yes," she said in a half-whisper. "Yes, I suppose so."

She laid the gun down on the bedside table and I stood up, slowly. I could not bear to look at the pale, cold beauty of her face; at the dark, shining hair, so sleekly coiled; at the white hands, so still.

"I'm sorry it had to be me, Clare."

She returned no answer and I walked to the door. There was a moment when I had to turn my back to her, a tense moment that produced a crawling sensation between my shoulder-blades, but nothing happened. I closed the door behind me and I had not walked more than six paces when I heard the shot.

I halted, listening, but the Marathon Hotel was indifferent to tragedy. No doors opened. There was no cry of alarm. The second floor was deserted. Slowly, I descended the stairs and walked out of the front door. Lenore was waiting for me beside the Rolls, her bright hair blowing in the breeze. She smiled and waved. I waved back.

The courtyard hummed with the bustle of departure, cars

leaving every few seconds laden with baggage and golf clubs. The excitement was all over now. Victor and vanquished were departing with their followers, leaving the golf course to the debris and the town to the blue sea and the smooth, eternal sands.

A black police car drew up beside me and out stepped McKellar and Sergeant Flowerdew. "Whither away, boys?" I asked.

"I've wrapped up your Dorothy Harding case for ye," crowed McKellar. "It was your little friend, Miss Thorne."

"Ah," I said, "so you've been snooping around Marchmont Road, too?"

His eyes bulged out at me and his face went brick red. "Where is she?" he demanded.

"In her room."

He jerked his head for Flowerdew to follow and they pushed past me into the hotel. I watched them go. "Somebody's going to be damned angry in a minute," I thought.

I thought of Duncan McIntyre going home in triumph with his Championship Trophy. He would not have won it if Heloise had not warned Charles that she had betrayed him and so, in a way, his victory was incomplete. I thought of Charles, weak, corrupt and yet with a curious strength. He had made a noble fight for his Championship, although he knew what lay at the end of it. I thought of Communism and its monstrous creed. The body of the monster was unreachable behind the Iron Curtain and all we could do was to lop off the tentacles wherever they appeared. That would be done in the case of the *Leeland*, but it was not enough.

I thought about Clare Thorne and all the people I had met. Soon I would forget most of them, but I would never forget Clare with her tortured, neurotic mind and her impossible dream world where only she was Queen. Her pale magnolia face, beautiful and damned, would haunt me in years to come. I had wanted so desperately to find and save her, only to discover that there was nothing to be saved.

There is no defeat that has not in it something of victory. There is no victory that has not in it something of defeat.

THE END

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